



## Recurrence by Veteris

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**Summary:** (\*No Season 3 Spoilers\*) After the gates closed, what will happen next? Elevens back, Will seems better and a new member has joined the party. But although the gates been closed, threats are still present in Hawkins, waiting to be faced.

# **1. Chapter One: The Reunion**

## **Chapter One: The Reunion**

Tiredness overpowered Eleven as she clung to Hopper, she was so tired it was sickening. She hadn't realized Hopper had started the elevator's ascent back up the tunnel, or how much darker the unearthed area under the lab was without the glow emitted from the Gate. All she could focus on was the hold Hopper had on her, and that she had on him.

She felt the elevator stop with a shunt, remembering where they were started to cause discomfort to return. Although she had walked past the bodies of the people who had wanted to hurt her, the nerves still resurfaced as she began to refocus. She knew they had to leave, but she was too drained to move, Hopper appeared to already know this, and picked her up off the floor and began to walk.

"You alright kid?" asked Hopper, trying to get through the shattered window without getting scratched. Eleven wanted to respond but all she could manage was a nod into his arm. She'd known closing the Gate would be hard, but she hadn't expected to feel this weak and small afterwards. She hadn't expected to even be here, she thought the monster would drag her back in like the Demogorgon had before, leaving her trapped in the Upside Down without an escape.

"You know you're safe now right?" stated Hopper. He must have seen the worry through the tiredness on her face and the darkness of the hall. "You can't be taken back there now, it's over." Hearing the word 'over' was re-assuring to both of them, but they both knew that not all of their problems were over, that they still had to deal with the people who would replace the bodies in the corridors.

They came across Dr Owens still sitting in the stairwell, he appeared slightly more aware than before Hopper had tied a tourniquet around his leg. Hopper lay El against the opposing wall to Owens, making sure she was supported enough not to flop over. He stood up and turned to Owens, "Hey Doc, do you think you could limp out of here with a crutch?" These words surprised El, she knew Hopper thought this man wasn't like the others, but she detested the idea of taking

him with them.

"That would be most appreciated Hop", the weak man muttered, looking up at the Chief, "Go through the door, turn right and go until you find a store room, you should find something appropriate in there." Before Hopper could leave, Owens handed him back his gun, "I think you should take this, so she doesn't think I'll hurt her with it." El was more surprised by this than Hopper giving aid to one of the 'bad men'. Maybe Dr Owens wasn't quite the same as the others, he knew what she could do yet gave away his weapon, he was either mad or confident in his ability to avoid her killing him.

Hopper nodded and left, giving her a look, one she knew meant 'It'll be alright.' Once the door shut the room was silent, she was starting to have troubles hearing with the blood drying in her ears, she began to clean it out with her sleeve.

"So Eleven, you've been with Hopper for almost a year now, it's impressive he's kept you a secret for so long, Hop is a pretty smart guy." El didn't know how to react, the doctor's words weren't threatening but sincere. She didn't want to reply, her throat was still sore, so she just stared at the odd man, he should be her enemy, but he is too friendly, and he even has Hoppers trust, something hard to earn.

Hopper returned with a mop, the strings taped down forming a cushion atop a stick. "This is the best I can do Doc, but first you've got to get up these stairs."

"Well Jimbo, could you give me a hand?" Hopper helped him up and passes him the crutch. Owens, with little grace, started dragging his leg up behind him, using the wall as a support and the crutch to help boost him up each step. El thought it was funny watching the scientist hobble up the stairs, until she realized she couldn't even manage that and Hop had to carry her back up like a baby.

The three of them slowly made their way towards the exit, passing the bodies of the Demo-dogs victims. "I'm guessing you succeeded in closing the gate then?" Asked Owens, using both the makeshift crutch and Hoppers shoulder to walk with them. "Truly incredible, in a year we didn't make a scratch to it, then you close it in less than an hour,

truly incredible."

El felt guilty, she had opened the gate in the first place, none of this would have happened if she had gone against Papa's orders and not interfered with the monster. She realized that Hopper was carrying her the same way Papa had the day she'd hurt those two guards who had tried and failed to lock her in 'the room'. The chill of the memory was offset by the comfort and safety Hopper provided, and as they neared the exit, El realized that everything would change now, hopefully for the better.

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"No, I am driving end of story," Steve interjected over Max, "I don't care that it's your brothers, you're too young and you can't even reach the pedals!"

"I can reach the pedals, I just couldn't figure out how to adjust the seat!"

"As if that's any better, just let me drive, I'm not going to crash your brother's stupid car, I do have a license."

"He's not my brother and I don't care that you have a license, can you even see properly after what Billy did to your face?" Guilt appeared across Max's face as she said this, she had been the reason for that.

Steve was just about to argue back when Mike decided to finally end this, "Hey, this isn't important, we need to get back to the Byers now!" That shut them up, "Steve drives, now let's go."

With that, they got into the car and headed off. Max somehow voluntarily sat in the back with Lucas and Dustin, Mike took the front seat, his status as leader had been fully recognized and restored by the party, even it's newest member. This didn't put Mike's mind to rest though, they had no idea what was happening with the others, all they knew was that the Demo-dogs had been heading towards the gate and that something had caused the car's lights to intensify for a moment.

Mike's current theory was that the lights were connected to Eleven closing the gate, but he still didn't know what that meant. Did she

remain on this side, did she succeed, did closing the gate stop the dogs or where they still after them? Mike had many questions, all he could hope for was Will being rid of the shadow monster and Eleven being safe, God he wanted her to be okay, he'd only just gotten her back, he couldn't imagine losing her again.

Mike's thoughts were interrupted by unsurprisingly more arguments from the car. "Eleven is not weird, she's our friend," Dustin retorted to Steve.

"Well you have to admit she's a bit weird, I mean, I'd heard a few things about her but what's with the crazy outfit and just scary... scary everything?" Steve shot back.

"She's not weird at all, so what that she turns up after a year looking like a Rockstar, it's pretty awesome." Dustin replied.

"Well, I mean she is pretty intense," Max said, adding her opinion into the conversation.

"Dustin, you have to agree it's pretty freaky her turning up to save our asses at the last moment dressed like she's joined a band. Also, how come she's been hiding with Hopper after he gave us up last year?"

"All that matters is that Els our friend and she's back," Mike countered, "she's finally home." But Mike wasn't sure about that yet, he had to see it to believe it, but the fact everyone else thought she was still around gave Mike hope that he would see her again.

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To Mike's discomfort they were the first back at the Byers, only Bob's car was present on the driveway. The house was still lit but the lack of movement made Mike worry, they had no idea what had happened, and they couldn't get hold of anyone on the radio's.

Mike had completely forgotten about Billy when he entered the house and found him still lying in front of the door unconscious.

"Shit, what do we do about this, does anyone have a pen?" asked Dustin from behind Mike.

"We're not drawing on his face," replied Max, "He's a massive dick but I need to get him home and hopefully have him cooperate a story."

"You sure he'll be helpful, I mean he hasn't exactly been great for us so far," Lucas interjected.

"Well I doubt he wants anyone knowing what happened here, his Dad would not go easy on him," responded Max. "Plus, I'm pretty sure he's going to be more agreeing after I threatened him with the bat."

"Listen, I think we should get him out of here before Mr's Byers' gets home, unless you want to explain what happened here." added Dustin. But as he finished the sound of a car started coming up the drive. "Will!" he exclaimed, forgetting his previous train of thought.

Mike was happy to see the Byers' car, but had wished to also see Hoppers following behind. Instead, the kids and Steve rushed out as the car halted, waiting to see who emerged, and in what state.

Jonathan and Nancy both exited at the same time, looking confused. "Why is Billy's car here?" questioned Nancy.

"Don't worry Nance, he's unconscious." came Dustin. Of Course, this didn't answer anything, but they fell silent as they watched Jonathan slowly lift Will from the car. He appeared even paler than before, completely drained of energy, but Mike could see the small rise and fall of his chest. Relief momentarily filled Mike, until he remembered Will was not the only friend he might have lost.

"Is he okay?" asked Max, looking worryingly at the small boy.

"He'll be alright," said Joyce as she appeared from the rear of the car.

"Is the monster gone?" Mike mumbled to Nancy as they made their way inside.

"I think so," she returned quietly, "It's out of Will at least, I saw it disappear into the sky, it looked like it was dissolving as it went, but you said it can't survive with the gate closed right?"

"Well hopefully not, but we're basing this off a game, although it'd make sense that there'd be no connection between the upside down

and our world if the gate were closed." Mike muttered.

The Wheelers were stopped by the line of people standing in front of the door. "Why is there an unconscious kid on the floor?" asked Joyce, obviously not hearing Dustin from the back of the car. Before she could get a response, she simply stepped over him and replied, "Just get him out of here before he wakes up."

At this Steve grabbed his shoulders and Max his legs, they carried the sleeping Billy towards his car, not caring they smacked his arms against the door frame. "Have you heard from Hopper at all?" Mike asked the Byers' as he regained his priority of thought.

"No, Jonathan contacted him when we got 'it' out of Will, the message got through, but we haven't heard anything from him. I'm sure she's fine, she has Hopper." Nancy reassured. But as Mike watched the Byers' disappear down the drawing covered hallway, he realized it could be a while until he discovered the fate of El.

"Mike, she'll be okay," repeated Lucas, "Together, her and Hopper are an unbeatable force." Mike felt no better with these words, he knew how powerful she was, he didn't need reminding. What worried Mike was what could happen outside of their control, what if she was returned to the Upside Down, what if closing the gate killed her?

Mike was so preoccupied in thought that he didn't notice his eye's beginning to water and Nancy pulling him into an embrace. Mike didn't care what his friends thought, just that El would be safe, and Nancy's affection made him feel she was.

A few moments later, after Mike had composed himself, he pulled away and turned to Lucas and Dustin, "You guys should get going, it's really late and we'll have to go to school tomorrow."

"You'd think saving the world would grant you a day off school or something," Dustin replied.

"Well unless you want to explain why you deserve the day off to your parents, you'd better head back, I'll stay here and update you tomorrow."



"If you're sure Mike?" replied Lucas, looking wearily at his friend, "I could do with a bit of sleep for tomorrow."

"Yeah, and I've got to get this asshole back and awake," came Max as she re-entered the house. "Hey Steve, I'll let you drive this time if you get us home!" she yelled.

"What do you mean this time?" questioned Nancy, looking worryingly over at the kids.

"Mike will explain, wont you Mike?" she stated as she started to exit.

"Sorry Mike," Lucas apologized as he followed, "I'll see you tomorrow."

"Yeah, good luck Mike," came Dustin as he gathered his headset from the table and followed his friends. "Oh, and make sure Mr's Byers knows what's in the fridge before she opens it."

Before Nancy could even ask, Dustin had shut the door, leaving Mike to explain everything. Mike didn't mind though, he knew this came with being the party leader again, and it was worth it. Although, he also didn't mind because his thoughts were still truly distracted with El.

As the car pulled away, Jonathan returned to the room. "They're off then, I thought they'd stick around a bit for Will?" mumbled Jonathan.

"Well the best thing for Will is rest, and their parents must already be wondering where they are. Oh shit, what about our parents?" Mike looked worryingly to Nancy.

"I told Mum I'd be back tonight, you?" asked Nancy.

"I haven't spoken to her since Friday, do you think she'll mind another day?"

"I'll ring and tell her we're staying here for the night, as I've been... studying with Jonathan and you've been keeping Will company whilst he's been sick, she can't be mad at that right?" supposed Nancy.

"Yeah, that sounds good enough. What have you and Jonathan been doing anyway?" questioned Mike.

Nancy and Jonathan began to shy, but Nancy quickly recovered, "I'll tell you what we've been doing the last few days after you tell me what you kids and Steve have been up to."

"Just go call Mum, I'll explain everything whilst we wait." Mike couldn't fully distract himself from El's absence, but he could try by recounting what they'd been up to whilst the others were out.

Whilst Nancy was speaking to their Mother, Mike kept watch out of the window, waiting for them to arrive, he knew they must soon. Jonathan kept going from room to room, gathering blankets and sheets for Will, whilst Joyce remained with her sleeping son, keeping a constant watch over him.

Nancy returned, looking a little red faced, "So, Mums alright, apparently Billy went round looking for Max, he was meant to tell you to come home. According to Mum, he was a very charming young man." This made Mike snigger, whilst making him increasingly sick.

"So, what were you doing whilst we were gone?" queried Nancy. Mike knew she wasn't going to be thrilled with what they'd done, how they'd started a fire in the tunnels. But, they were all okay, so she couldn't get too mad right? "Start with Billy Mike." she coaxed, as Jonathan came and sat next to her on the couch.

Mike sat down in one of the chairs and began, "So Billy came to get Max and Steve couldn't stop him, they had a fight and Steve lost, badly."

"So why was Billy unconscious on the floor then?" wondered Jonathan.

"Well whilst Billy was beating up Steve, Max injected him with the stuff we used to keep Will asleep."

"You mean Max just grabbed a syringe and injected Billy!" blurted Nancy, clearly in shock at the actions of the kids.

"So?" Mike defended, "Joyce did the same thing with Will."

"Yes, but it's different if Joyce does it," protested Nancy.

"Yeah, well we didn't expect her to do it, or almost hit him with the bat, she is Mad Max."

"Whatever," responded Jonathan, "Where did you all go then?"

"We went for Pizza." Mike tried, but they weren't buying it, unsurprisingly. "We went and started a fire in the tunnels."

"What do you mean start a fire in the tunnels!" blurted Nancy. Mike could see Nancy was mad, he'd been expecting it, and he knew she wouldn't be the only one to express their dislike for what they'd done. But thought suddenly left Mike's head before he could reply when a beam of light came through the remaining window.

He was outside the house as the car halted, the lights still clouding his vision. Once they were off, Mike had never been so relieved, she was there, on the back seat, she was there. He sprinted to the rear door, opening it before Hopper could even exit, and she was there, alive, weakly leaning against the seat, head tilted towards him, with a small smile across her depleted face.

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**I'm British so if anything the characters say doesn't make sense for an American to say, let me know. I am also working on more chapters, I have quite a bit planned and have for a while, so there will be updates, I just don't know how frequently yet. I do know that this chapter is likely a little longer than the others will be in future although I'm not sure until I finish writing them.**

## **2. Chapter Two: The Reveal**

### **Chapter Two: The Reveal**

Before Mike could even speak, Eleven had fallen towards him, stretching to wrap her arms around his neck. Her chin lay on Mike's shoulder, a strong grip around him whilst she lay across the seat. Mike had wrapped his arms across the top of her back, around the huge jacket she now wore.

Nothing was said for a minute, they remained silent apart from the sniffles from them both. Mike could start to feel El's grip loosening and her head starting to sink, the cold emitted by El was also becoming apparent.

"Um... you two can stay out here all night if you want but I need the car for a bit", addressed Hopper. "I need to get Owens here to a hospital before he gets anymore blood on the seat.

Mike hadn't realized Owens was with them, he slowly turned to see him passed out on the passenger seat. He felt bad for Owens, they'd left him there whilst they escaped, and even though he worked for Hawkins lab, he still liked him, he seemed kinder than the other scientists.

"Are you ready to move," he asked the sluggish girl on his shoulder. He felt her head move slightly downwards, then it rubbed against his shoulder a few times, telling him she was ready. Hopper came to stand beside him to help move the drained girl.

The kids released their grips on each other and El slid upright into a sitting position, letting Mike help her up. She then scooted towards him, staying supported against the seat. Once on the edge, she shifted her feet towards them, and slowly lowered herself down off the seat, into Mike.

He was ready, clasping her as she fell slowly towards him, supporting her upright. The closeness was reassuring to Mike, that she was back now. Steadily, El rolled around to face the same direction as Mike, keeping one arm over his shoulders, and one of his around her back.

They started to trek together towards the house, Hopper following close behind. El struggled with the steps, requiring Hopper to help boost her up along with Mike's support. Once they were near the couch, Mike could definitely feel greater strain from Eleven as she appeared ever more tired, apparent from her free fall onto it once close enough.

Mike turned to see her weakly looking towards him, with a slight smirk on her face. In the light he could see the dried blood smeared from her ears and nose, that her face was paler than usual, and she looked drained. He dropped down beside her gazing across her face, which was responded with 'the puzzled look' he had deeply missed even if it had become more amusing with her eyes covered in dark eyeshadow. "Don't worry... safe now," she declared smiling, repositioning to lean against Mike instead of the cushions.

Mike's worrying began to dissipate, he'd known they were safe since she returned, but her saying it was a level of reassurance that squashed his doubts. "You going to be alright whilst I take Owens to the Hospital," Hopper asked El, looking down the cluttered corridor. Receiving a small nod from her, he smiled tiredly, "Good, I won't be long, just going to check on Will and Joyce first," and with that, he proceeded down the shadowy corridor.

As Hopper left Nancy and Jonathan entered, Jonathan holding a blanket which Nancy took and lay across El. Mike could feel her stiffen besides him, clearly uncomfortable with Nancy being near, "It's okay El, Nancy won't harm you," he vowed. Nancy retreating a few paces at his words, looking apologetic and confused, he didn't blame her for not understanding how hard it was for El to trust, especially when she was too fatigued to defend herself.

"Jonathan, can you clean Will's wound again soon and apply new bandages, otherwise it'll be fine," came Hopper, striding up the corridor. "Good work you two by the way," he directed at Nancy and Jonathan. He then turned to face El on the couch, "I'll be back soon kiddo," stated Hopper, turning towards the door.

A small chill infiltrated through the doorway as Hopper left, causing El to curl the blanket around her arms. Jonathan left to tend to Will leaving Nancy lost at what to do, until El's stomach grumbled,

"Would you like something to eat?" she asked the both of them. Mike felt El nudge her head into his shoulder, which clear to only Mike meant 'yes'.

"Okay Nance, something would be good," he responded. "Eggos would be great if there's any," he gladly added, immediately feeling El perk up at the word. Nancy also appeared amused as she walked away towards the kitchen, leaving El snuggled against Mike. They were quiet for the moment, El tilted against Mike, he wanted to talk with her and he knew she did with him, but for that moment they allowed serenity in their recently hectic lives.

"What the shit!" yelled Nancy, causing both El and Mike to bolt upright, Mike could hear Jonathan running down the hall. "Why is there a dead dog in the fridge?" cursed Nancy. Mike now remembered Dustin insisting on preserving a dog for 'science', now he wished he hadn't as Dustin wasn't here to explain that to the shocked Nancy.

"Mike, why's there a dog in the fridge?" questioned Jonathan, who looked over the wrapped body shoved into the small space.

"Dustin said it was for scientific research or something," replied Mike, he really wished he wasn't the one who had to explain this. He rose from the couch, giving El the sign he'd return soon, and made his way to the kitchen, greeted by the stares of the elder two. "Look, Dustin and Steve did it alright, I'd forgotten about it," he said defensively.

"Why would they do that... never mind, just wish they'd left a note or something." added Nancy. Mike continued towards the sink as Nancy and Jonathan closed the fridge and began to clean the food from the floor. Mike filled a bowl with warm water and grabbed a fresh dishcloth from the cupboard underneath. When he returned to the living room, El had settled back into the grooves of the couch.

Mike sat beside her on the old seat, crossing his legs and carefully spinning around to face his depleted friend, without tipping the bowl. He could see the commotion in the kitchen had awoken El a tad, she now lay with her shoulder buried in the fabric, facing towards him. He placed the cloth gently in her hand and grabbed the bowl, holding

it closer to her.

"Mike... can you do it... please?" softly insisted El, placing it in Mike's free hand. He obliged swiftly, carefully wiping away the cracked, dried blood from above her lip and beneath her ears with the dampened cotton. He could see her keeping a passionate gaze on him, watching his eyes and hands work, he worried he would press too hard, but she didn't flinch or stir.

When finished, he placed the cloth and bowl on the table and turned back to her. Mike knew it was time they finally spoke properly, not just hellos and goodbyes before facing a world destroying threat, actual conversation and questions. He didn't know where to start, he hadn't seen her for almost a year, a lot had happened that he had no clue about, he was lost with what to start with. Luckily, she wasn't.

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"Jane," she stated. "My name is Jane." Mike was silent for a second, clearly stunned by what he'd heard. "I found Mama," she added, feeling inexplicably shy and joyful.

"That's amazing El... I mean Jane," spluttered Mike.

"Mike," said El, drawing his eyes up towards her. "You can call me El."

"But Jane's your name, your real name," responded Mike. "I really like the name Jane, I'll get used to using it over time,"

"Mike." She still didn't really know how to explain this to him. "My name is Jane, but you call me El. You named me El."

"Are you sure," queried Mike. "You sure it won't remind you of being Eleven and not Jane." El hadn't thought about that, but she already had her answer.

"Eleven is who I am," she declared. "I still want to be Eleven, I don't want to change." He seemed to be following her point.

"So, I can still call you El, and your totally fine with that," questioned Mike.

"Yes, Mike. Happy being El." And she was, she'd hated her life in the lab, but she didn't want to start being called Jane like she wasn't that person anymore. She preferred being called El than Jane, it was her first proper name, not a number decided by people who didn't care for her. Although her mother named her Jane, her real friends called her El.

"Okay El," smiled Mike. "El it is, but maybe we should all stop calling you Eleven, instead just El." She understood this, she couldn't be called Eleven if she wanted to appear normal. She gave him another nod, causing him to grin. Suddenly, that grin was gone though, he looked worried instead. "If you found your Mum, does that mean you're going to leave?" She'd thought about that on the bus home, she knew what she wanted.

"I want to stay with Hopper" she declared. Mike's delight wasn't subtle, he looked overcome with relief.

"What's your mother like?" asked Mike, a more complicated answer was needed for that.

"She's like me, I connected with her. But she's stuck," said El sadly.

"What do you mean by stuck," questioned Mike.

"The bad men made her sick, she's stuck in a dream," murmured El.

"I'm sorry El," comforted Mike, moving his hand to hers, giving a gentle squeeze, filling her with content. "When you say you connected, did she speak to you?"

"No," lamented El. "She showed me what happened to her, she told me what to do."

"What did she tell you to do," queried Mike.

"She showed me eight." Mike took a second to understand what she'd said, he looked at her with great curiosity. "I found her Mike, but she was hunting people, Mama wanted me to kill people," sniffed El, eyes starting to water. Mike moved closer, embracing her tightly, returning warmth she desperately needed.



"Mike," quietly said El, "Have I let her down, should I do what she wants me to do?" Mike slowly pulled back, giving a weak smile as he faced her.

"El, you shouldn't have to do anything you don't want to, even if your mother wants you to, you're not letting her down by choosing to do what you think is right." comforted Mike.

"Mike," asked El quietly, "Are you sure?" She didn't know if she should be doing it for her mother, who had risked her life to save her and paid the price.

"Did you want to kill anyone," asked Mike, El shrugged heavily.

"We went to kill someone Mike, I almost did," El admitted sadly.

"But why didn't you," he asked her.

"Because he was sorry... he also had... kids," El admitted, feeling a monster, dipping her head in shame.

"El," said Mike, she looked up towards him. "You did what you thought was right, that's what matters. If it means anything, I think you did the right thing, stopping before you did something you didn't want to. You shouldn't do things just because your told to, you should do what you think is right."

"But I let Mama and Kali down," stated El, she'd disappointed them both.

"And if they really care for you, they'll understand your decision," guaranteed Mike.

"Really," questioned El.

"I promise," answered Mike. She knew he was being genuine, she could see his empathy. She knew he cared, that he would help her if and when she needed it. She returned the squeeze to the hand they'd failed to release, but before she could say anything else, Nancy entered with some pillows, a blanket and a plate of Eggos, placing them on the table. She left briskly, but El could see her smirk before she was out of sight. Mike pretended to ignore seeing Nancy

smirking, instead passing El a pillow and placing the plate of Eggos between them.

They ate quietly, finishing the plate within minutes. El was beginning to feel sleepy again, and she could see Mike suppress a yawn. She positioned the cushion behind her and pulled her legs up beside her, copying what Mike had done minutes before.

"El," came Mike, after finishing his last Eggo, "How did you find out about your Mother?"

"Hopper had a box with a photo," she answered. "I found her like how I listened to you."

"Okay, but why didn't Hopper just tell you about your Mother." asked Mike. She thought back to their conversation in the car and the best way to explain it.

"He didn't want me to go," she said happily. "He wanted me to stay."

"Okay, that makes sense," smiled Mike. "I'm sorry I got mad at him earlier," spluttered Mike, I understand why he did it, it's just annoying, you know?"

"Yes," replied El truthfully. "I got mad too, we had an argument as well," admitted El.

"Really, why," questioned Mike. Sometimes she wished he was less curious, but he deserved to know why.

"I went to see you, at school," she admitted. Mike didn't seem as surprised as she was expecting.

"I thought it must have been you, knocking Max off her board," grinned Mike. "Why didn't you come talk to me or let me know you were there?"

"Wasn't safe, could put you in danger," shared El.

"But you don't have to worry about me being safe all the time, okay," stated Mike. She nodded her response, she was beginning to become drowsy, something Mike noticed as he picked up his blanket and

wrapped himself within it. Although she was exhausted, she used her powers to flick the switch instead of moving to do it, it seemed easier just to use her powers with how comfortable she was, this amused Mike.

For a few minutes they remained quiet, looking at one another in the dimly lit room. She could see him starting to struggle keeping his eyes open, that he wanted to sleep as much as her, but not before he said something.

"I'm really glad your home El, for good this time" said Mike quietly.

"Me too," she replied softly.

Within a few minutes, both were fast asleep, both were happy, and both still held onto one another's hand under their blankets.

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Hopper was glad to be far away from that hospital when he pulled into the Byers' driveway. He'd spent so much time in hospital back in New York he couldn't stand them, even if Hawkins General was much smaller and less industrious, hospitals were always gloomy.

At Least he had been able to get Owens awake and together before they went in, so they could get his story straight. They'd decided the doctor wouldn't discuss what happened to his leg with hospital staff, that he shouldn't bother with a cover story because it wasn't needed, Hopper was taking him in and would ask for the staff not to question him on what happened. Although this would leave the hospital employees potentially curious as to what was going on, it was better than creating an elaborate story that would fall apart when questioned, the Byers tale was only believable because there wasn't any other alternative thinkable by what most people knew.

Hopper had no clue of the time apart from he could see was it was dark, but in mid-autumn that wasn't helpful really considering ten hours of the day were spent in gloom. Freezing cold was the best idea of the temperature, even with his reasonable coat the scrub tunic was useless at keeping him remotely warm. In his haste to rush inside, he nearly tripped over the wheeler kids bike, asking the question of why the hell was he still here.

As he opened the door the coziness of the small house drenched him, pulling him speedily inside to seal its escape. The room was meagerly lit by small lamps, but it didn't stop him from seeing her huddled into the couch, bundled in a blanket. She looked untroubled, like closing the gate and being back with Mike fulfilled her. He wasn't surprised to see Mike by her side after thinking about it, they were inseparable.

Hopper found it amusing how similar they really were, both sleeping sat up against propped pillows under blankets. Also, how they both had short, dark hair and similar frames, not to mention both having violent outbursts towards him, something he found less amusing and more of an annoyance.

The kitchen was dimly lit too, and at the table sat Joyce, looking towards the door. He walked over towards her and at her lack of registering his presence, he grabbed her attention with his hand on her shoulder. "You should get some sleep," stated Hopper.

"No no, I can't sleep with Will like he is and... Bob," Joyce stated, looking down at the table. "What do we do about Bob, how do we explain it? When do we tell people or have a funeral, can I even tell his family?" stammered Joyce.

"Joyce," stopped Hopper, "We will figure it out tomorrow, okay, we will figure it out. But first I think you should just try and get some sleep. Will is fine, I'll go check his burn but otherwise he is fine. It will take time, but you will have him back, he's a tough kid and he'll get over all of this. But to do that, he needs his mother and you need to get some rest."

"But how do I deal with all this Hopper, a traumatized kid and... and," continued Joyce.

"Joyce," started Hopper, "get some sleep, we will deal with it." With that he left to check Will's wound, and once he was satisfied it was healing he returned to the kitchen where Joyce wasn't. He turned off the light and entered the living room, where he removed his coat, settled into an armchair and was swiftly asleep.

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**This chapter isn't as good as the first, I know that. I didn't know**

what to include in the kid's conversation, as I could have written much more in, but I've decided to save it for later. I originally wrote it without any mention of her name or her mother but that seemed more important than what I had them discussing before. I hope you like it and feel free to give any feedback you'd like.

### 3. Chapter Three: The Deal

#### Chapter Three: The Deal

Max hated how noiseless the car was, even though the V8 engine roared the car felt quiet with nobody talking. Usually she could listen to the engine and watch the road to keep preoccupied whilst with Billy, but with him unconscious in the back and the other seats being used by Lucas, Dustin and Steve, it was hard not to think about what had happened.

"So just to make sure I fully understand, those Demon-dogs were from a different dimension?" asked Max.

"For the last time they're called Demo-dogs, and yes... they originated from a different dimension, although they probably developed here, like Dart," replied Dustin, quieting when mentioning Dart. She didn't understand his bond with it, it was a gross, slimy slug that grew and ate his cat, then tried to eat them.

"So, we defeated creatures from another world, that's pretty cool," she added. It was cool that they'd defeated things no one else even knew about, it was like they'd defended the world from space aliens, but even more unbelievable.

"When you say we defeated them, are you including your contribution of screaming at them," teased Steve.

"Are you including your contribution of running away from them," she retorted, watching him grin as she said it. "I'm guessing the only ones who actually anything did were Eleven and Chief Hopper."

"Hey, we played our role, we contributed to the team effort," responded Steve.

"If you start with your stupid basketball analogy again you can walk home," said Max, before Steve could continue babbling on about irrelevant game talk she wasn't sure he actually understood.

"Have fun getting me out of this seat, this car really moves," stated

Steve, shuffling slightly into the seat, wrapping his hands further around the wheel.

"Okay, but have fun staying seated when Billy wakes up," reminded Max. Mentioning Billy didn't have the same crushing weight as before, after they'd carried him out of the house and crammed him into the car, she found it easier to joke about him. Steve even found this funny, although she knew he was still shaken by Billy's madness, they all were a little.

She realized Dustin and Lucas were talking to each other on the back row, obscuring their mouths from the front but not having to whisper due to the loudness of the car. She turned to face them, they quickly shot back as if they hadn't been doing anything, so she decided to ignore them.

"So, you think they really did it, they really closed the gate?" queried Max.

"Yeah, I mean we haven't been chased down by angry Demo-dogs yet," joked Lucas, "also the lights intensifying then going back to normal seems like Eleven closing the gate to me. I mentioned how lights seem to go haywire when she uses her powers yesterday, it must have been her closing the gate."

"Plus, the compass has started facing north again," declared Dustin.

"What does that mean," said Steve, looking confused as Max felt.

"Compasses are attracted towards the earth's magnetic North pole right," affirmed Dustin, Max nodded in response whilst Steve just pretended not to notice. "Well compasses have been pointing towards the gate due to the electromagnetic field caused by the amount of power surrounding the gate. Well at least compasses near enough to the lab have, on the other end of town they've been working fine, but I checked Will's before we left, it wasn't pointing towards the lab. Lucas, did you seriously forget to mention this?"

"What... no, it didn't seem massively important," retorted Lucas. "How Come you've decided to tell us this now, not like, ages ago."

"Hey, shut it you too," interrupted Steve. "Max, where the hell is your house?"

"Just up here," she responded, "park up over there and I'll wake Billy up." She knew she'd have to wake him up now, they needed to come to an agreement sooner than later, but it didn't make her dread it any less.

Steve pulled to the side of the road, across and a few doors down from Max's house. He stopped the car with more grace than Max had managed, then switched the engine off, plunging the car into silence.

"Do you want us here when he wakes up?" Lucas asked hesitantly. Without the roaring engine noise everything seemed loud, she missed it now more than before.

"No, you guys go, I can handle Billy," said Max, failing to hide the doubt in her voice. She had no idea how to approach this, to pretend it didn't happen or use the fact that it did.

"Are you sure?" worried Lucas, climbing out of the car, "you don't have to, we can..."

"Come on kid, she's got this" said Steve, grabbing Lucas by the shoulder, "do you want the bat to give him another scare though?" suggested Steve.

"I'll be fine, plus where am I going to hide it afterwards anyway," stated Max. She probably didn't need the bat to scare Billy, although she did like that bat.

Steve shrugged and headed to the trunk, probably to grab his prized possession. Dustin climbed out the same time as Max, putting his arm on the door whilst he bent down towards Billy.

"Nighty night you scary son of a bitch," he whispered to the lifeless Billy. Somehow it didn't surprise her that he did this, it was a particularly weird thing for someone to do, but then this was Dusti, and it wasn't he weirdest thing to happen today. That didn't stop Lucas looking at his strange friend with embarrassment and shake his head in disapproval.



The two Boys headed towards Steve where they began collecting their things from the trunk. She could hear Steve and Dustin muttering something whilst she stared at Billy, deciding the best way to wake him up.

"Bye Max, hope it goes alright with Billy," came Lucas, as he and the other boys began walking away from the car. Lucas didn't look pleased to be leaving but having him around for this would just make it worse.

"See ya stalker," joked Max. Lucas perked up a little at hearing this, but once Dustin and Steve started laughing at him, he began to look flushed. "Bye coach, bye teach," added Max in the direction of the sniggering boys.

"Bye Max, hey! What do you mean by teach, just because I have to remind you how a compass works, doesn't mean I'm a teacher," retorted Dustin. Steve simply waved without looking and continued walking with the boys. "I mean I would be a pretty great teacher, like Mr Clark," Dustin continued as they walked down the dimly lit road, fading out of earshot.

Dustin could be irritating, but she'd rather listen to his babbling than have to negotiate with her maniac stepbrother. She knew her approach now, but worried about the consequences it could have, especially to her friends. But she had to do this, otherwise her friends definitely wouldn't be safe. She hesitantly stepped into the back of the car, took a deep breath, and struck a hard punch to his shoulder.

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Billy never got cloudy headed, even after a party he'd wake up focused, even if it was a bit later than usual. But everything looked fuzzy, he felt fuzzy, like the room was humid, except it wasn't hot, all he could feel was pain across his back and in his shoulder. He wasn't in a room, he was in his Camaro, but he was in the back and he wasn't alone.

"Are you awake Billy?" asked Max, his stepsister, the bitch who stabbed him. "Listen Billy, we're sorting this out now, so get up!" And with her final word, he felt her sharply slap the side of his face, he was going to kill her for this.

"Your dead," he muttered. He was about to plough his fist into the shape which was Max when she faded into the background, pulling him down, forcing him forward onto the seat beside him.

"Listen you ass hole, you're going to forget about my friends and what happened tonight, you're going to stop being a dick to Steve and you're going to leave me alone," she told Billy.

"Yeah, and why should I do that?" He asked, preparing to jump of his stomach and tackle her to the ground.

"Because otherwise I'll tell your Dad that you've hurt me."

He froze, "You wouldn't do that, you can't do that!" he protested.

"Why not, it's not like your known for being a gentle soul," she retorted.

"You can't make stuff like this up Max," blurted Billy.

"And I'm not, you have hurt me and my friends, so stop and he doesn't have to know," Max warned.

He couldn't believe this, he'd been sent to get her after she had run off, and now he was lying across his back seats, head out the door, straining to look up at her through the pain in his back, and she was threatening him. But these threats were not to be taken lightly, the only person scarier than Max in this moment was his father, and what he'd do if she told him these lies.

"Alright Max, you win," admitted Billy, clambering out of his car. "I'll leave your friends alone, including Herrington," the words stung him.

"Good. Now drive us home and tell them it took a while to find me, don't mention Steve or anything else, just agree with what I say," stated Max. Once he was up he noticed they were back on their street, their house was close.

"How the hell did we get here," asked Billy.

"You drove us here, that's what they'll reasonably think," replied Max.

"So, Herrington drove my car, I'm gonna kill him!" raged Billy.

"No, you're not, you're going to avoid him from now on," guaranteed Max.

He hated this, he hated her. He slumped into his seat, seeing the house lights on was only bad for him and good for her. She slipped into the seat next to him, closed the door and they were off to the nightmare.

---

"Why didn't we just drive to your car, so you could drive us home," complained Dustin. He'd been walking, running and building all day, his legs ached and now he had to walk home, which felt much further than it actually was.

"Quiet kid, were almost there," replied Steve. Dustin knew Steve felt the same and was probably just as annoyed that he hadn't gone to pick up his car.

"Do you think Max will be okay?" asked Lucas, doubtfully.

"Yes Lucas, she'll be fine, or did you not see her almost hit him with that bat," retorted Dustin. Max was going to be fine, Lucas just worried too much.

"Yeah, chill dude, she's probably breaking his fingers right now," joked Steve. Dustin thought it was fitting, but Lucas still looked worried.

It was quiet for a moment, it was nice out, but a little cold, and Dustin was too tired to really enjoy walking through the deserted streets. "I should have just taken Mike's bike, you could have taken Wills Lucas, he never uses it," moaned Dustin.

"What, yeah, sure," responded Lucas, clear to Dustin not paying any attention.

"Come on man, she'll be fine," Dustin reassured. "She can handle herself better than any of us."

"Well... I mean," interjected Steve.

"Come on Steve, you couldn't take down Billy, your fight was a good try, but did you even think you had a chance?" questioned Dustin.

"Yes! Okay maybe not, but I got a few good hits off," replied Steve. Dustin was surprised Steve had lasted as long as he had, Billy hit hard, and Steve wasn't known for his ability to win a fight.

The boys continued walking, Lucas quieter than usual, not even mentioning them walking Dustin's preferred route rather than his own, as Dustin and Steve discussed the Upside down. Lucas was being stupid worrying, wasn't he, Max could handle her stepbrother, the better question was whether Billy had seen anything. He hadn't seemed to notice the Byers house being covered in crayon drawings, or that the window had a hole in it, he really wasn't that clever. A short while later, Steve needed to depart from the boys.

"Right, do you guys want lifts home from school tomorrow?" asked Steve.

"We need to get our bikes first, and could you take us to Will's instead?" replied Dustin.

Steve took a moment to consider this, "I can take you to your bikes but you're not putting them in my car.

"Come on man, it's just a bit of mud," complained Lucas.

"Yeah, just a bit of mud is enough. Plus, my Dad will kill me if I mess that car up,"

"Fine but meet us straight after school in the car park, okay," said Dustin. "Can we bring Max too?"

"Yeah sure, whatever kid, I'll see you tomorrow," finished Steve, as walked down the branching path, equally dark as their own.

"Yeah, you two Steve," replied Dustin, as he and Lucas started back towards their houses.

Once the boys were out of earshot, Lucas seemed to become more vocal in his questioning, "Why the hell are you keeping him around?"

"What do you mean 'keeping him around'" replied Dustin. "He's nice, and he isn't too busy flirting with his girlfriend."

"For the last time, she's not my girlfriend, and how was I supposed to know..."

"Know that Erica turned off your radio, I thought you would have noticed something you use every day has been switch off.", interrupted Dustin. "You were clearly too busy with Max to help out your friends."

"Help you out, I didn't keep a Demogorgon to try and impress her, you wouldn't have needed help if you weren't trying to get us all killed."

"I did not keep Dart to impress Max... I thought I'd made a scientific discovery..."

"Cut the bull, you did it to impress Max," stated Lucas. Dustin hated that it was true, although Dart could have been an evolutionary first, he'd thought he was impressive and hoped Max thought the same. But even though she didn't find him impressive and Dart ate his cat, he still missed him a bit.

"Look man, it doesn't matter now," said Lucas, breaking the silence, "can we just put it behind us?" Dustin wanted nothing more, and gladly shook Lucas's hand.

"Hey, Steve may not be the smartest..." started Dustin.

"You think?" interrupted Lucas

"But", Dustin continued, "he has been very helpful dealing with Demo-dogs and he's a nice guy, he has useful advice."

"Advice for what, keeping your hair tidy?" questioned Lucas.

"Well... yeah, among other things, but just because he doesn't know the difference between the Germans and the Nazis, doesn't mean he knows nothing," retorted Dustin.

"Yeah but, how does he not know the difference?"

"I'm sure loads of people don't know, like how Mike's dad doesn't know the difference between a communist and Russian,"

"I guess, but would you want to hang out with Mike's dad all day, it would just be weird," Lucas asked.

"Yeah, but not because he's stupid, because he's Mike's dad, he's like three times our age."

"I guess, but no inviting him to a campaign, I think he'd struggle understanding the character sheet."

"Well I'm not asking you to be best buds with him or anything, just understand he's a cool guy, I'm not replacing anyone," stated Dustin.

"That fact that you suggested that, makes it sound like you are," accused Lucas.

"No... but when you and Mike are too busy with your girlfriends, it'd be nice if I had someone to hang out with,"

"So, you see Steve as your boyfriend?" asked Lucas.

"What! No! Shut up Lucas!" barked Dustin, voice breaking as untimely as ever.

"And what about Will, don't forget Will."

"I'm not forgetting Will, but I like hanging out with Steve, okay, he understands me,"

"Do you hear that?" whispered Lucas as they approached Dustin's driveway.

"What, no?" responded Dustin, worried.

"I can hear... church bells!"

"Ha, very funny Lucas, I'll see you tomorrow," retaliated Dustin.

"Yeah, see you later man," chirped Lucas, walking away. Dustin knew Lucas thought he was being funny, but when they were at school

tomorrow, and Max was there too, he was going to have a lot of fun.

## 4. Chapter Four: Aftermath

### Chapter Four: Aftermath

The pit was deep and dark, nothing could be seen, all she could feel was the air passing over her as she fell deeper. She felt like she knew this place, but she kept falling down the eternal hole. She began to hear a noise, it came from all around her, a loud screeching surrounding her like the fading air. Suddenly, she awoke, the room was dimly lit, she could still feel the screeching, but Mike was there now.

"El, are you okay?" asked Mike softly. He looked worried, like before she went to close the gate worried.

"Bad dream," she replied. Then she noticed she was soaked with sweat, causing her eye makeup to run into her hands as she wiped it away.

"Are you sure?" queried Mike, taking her hand. His hand was warm and soft and partially wet, just like his hair.

"Yes," she said nodding, "feeling better now," she no longer felt like she was falling at least.

"I've got to go to school in a minute, I wasn't going to wake you, but I promise I'll come see you straight afterwards, okay." She was disappointed he was leaving, but glad she'd get to see him later.

"I'll be waiting" she responded, adjusting herself into a comfortable position on the couch.

"Get some more rest, I'll see you later El," responded Mike, pulling the blanket back over her.

Nancy and Jonathan entered carrying backpacks, talking too quietly for El to hear, Mike had gone behind Hoppers chair to grab his bag. She hadn't even realised Hopper was in the room, sleeping on one of the chairs wearing his hat over his face, which seemed weird considering they were indoors.



"Bye Mike" she responded quietly, watching him follow after the other two, closing the door gently behind him.

It was silent apart from Hoppers faint breathing coming from the corner of the dull room. El presumed Joyce and Will were still asleep further through the house, she still hadn't really met Will in person, only via the in-between. She didn't know if he remembered her from when she made contact before, that was the only time they'd ever spoken.

She was still extremely tired; the couch cushions were soft while the blanket was cosy. She definitely felt like sleep, and it would make the time pass quicker, and within a few minutes of Mike leaving, she was again blissfully asleep.

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Mike didn't like this, he knew Nancy fancied Jonathan, even when she'd denied it a year ago but it was funny then, it wasn't now. Mike liked Jonathan as Will's brother; he wasn't mean, was funny and gave Will cool mixtapes that they sometimes listened too when they went to his house. But having to sit in the back of Jonathan's car while him and Nancy tried not to look weird, was killing him.

He guessed they were dating now, she'd gone with the Byers yesterday and Steve had definitely appeared gloomy, which didn't bother Mike. He hated that Steve and Nancy had gone out with each other for so long. Steve seemed nice, but he was at least a lightyear away from being intelligent. Mike's parents liked him as well, so he was always around for dinner, which was always painful enough.

"So, where were you two while the world was ending?" asked Mike, destroying the awkward silence between the front and back of the vehicle.

"Nothing, we were doing nothing," replied Nancy, which Mike immediately knew to be bad.

"That means you were doing something you know I won't like," stated Mike.

"No, but it's better kept as a surprise," Nancy responded, while

Jonathan continue to focus on driving, pretending not to listen to the conversation.

"Nancy, tell me what you were doing," insisted Mike. Nancy said nothing, which is how this always goes, "Nancy, tell me what you were doing or else I'll tell Jonathan about the poster you brought when you were twelve, you know the one."

"We went to see Murray Bauman, he used to be an investigative journalist for the Chicago Sun-Times," said Nancy hesitantly.

"So, you went to him for a homework project or something?" asked Mike, unsure of how this warranted being a surprise.

"No. We went to him to shut down Hawkins labs," stated Nancy, catching Mike off guard.

"How is an ex-investigative journalist going to do that, and don't you remember Hopper demanding we all stay away from the lab," reminded Mike.

"We wanted justice Mike, for Barbara and Will," explained Nancy.

"Justice for Will, the lab has been helping Will," said Mike, seemingly trying to clarify this.

"They've been doing tests on him," she insisted.

"To help him get better."

"No Mike, for research," retorted Nancy.

"So, what if they were doing both, it's not necessarily a bad thing, them trying to understand more."

"If the lab was helping Will, how come it all just got a lot worse," Nancy inquired.

"Jonathan, you must have heard of Dr Owens. He was helping Will, he even helped us escape the lab," asked Mike.

"We've met him Mike," replied Nancy, saving Jonathan from

answering.

"What, did he take you on a tour or something," asked Mike sarcastically.

"He did actually, and while we were there we got a recording of him admitting to Barbra's death."

"You did what!" exclaimed Mike. "That will get you killed, and nobody's going to believe any of it."

"Murray believed us," said Nancy.

"Well it's not like it can go public, who'd believe the crazy story of a portal to another world within Hawkins Labs?" reasoned Mike.

"That's why we watered down the story," she replied.

"What does that even mean?" Mike asked.

"We sent enough evidence to implicate the lab in Barbs death, but that it was a chemical leak that killed her,"

"Okay, but did you ask Hopper about doing this?"

"No, why would I? he'd just say no," she responded.

"Yeah, probably because it puts you on the labs radar," said Mike.

"We were already on the labs radar Mike, how many of the phones are bugged?"

"If Hawkins hears that evidence they'll know it was you two who got it," insisted Mike.

"Yeah, but how many of them are there left who can say it was us?"

"There are recordings and logbooks obviously, and you didn't know they were going to get attacked before you did it. You're lucky Owens probably won't turn you over, but if they get hold of the recording and discover it's him, they'll know it's you two," compiled Mike.

"Mike, they're not going to care, most of their staff are gone, they've

got bigger issues."

"Until they don't," interrupted Mike.

"Mike, it'll be fine, now go to school." Mike hadn't noticed they were in the car park for school. Nancy was stupid to do this, she not only endangered herself but also everyone else. But it seemed stupid for Mike to continue pointing out Nancy's recklessness when it wouldn't change anything, so he left the car and headed to class.

It was funny how everything appeared the same as he strolled to class. Kimberly and Jacob were arguing over electricity equations, Michelle was showing off something to her followers and Jeffrey was trying to balance a football on his head while the grade sevens watched in amazement. None of them had a clue about the dangerous creatures who were roaming the outskirts of the city just yesterday, or the massacre that occurred at the facility on the other side of town.

Mike was actually a few minutes early to class, so as he waited for Mr Clark he realised he didn't seem as tired as he should. Due to how late he was up last night and how much happened yesterday, he thought he'd be more tired but he felt like he hadn't slept so well in a long time. It still hadn't really sunk in, she was back and alive, he'd thought she was out there but he didn't know if he was just crazy, but she was definitely back now.

Mr Clark was on time as always, which was more than could be said for the others, none of which were there until the middle of the lesson, when Max busted in midway through Mr Clark's explanation of the different human tissues. Being Max, she wasn't particularly polite about it, seemingly ignoring Mr Clark and slumping into Wills seat next to Mike, which felt wrong.

"How's Eleven?" she whispered once Mr Clark had begun talking again.

"She's fine, she did it, where are the others?" he asked quietly while simultaneously taking notes from Mr Clark's ongoing lesson.

"How would I know," retorted Max, not bothering to take out her

books or even remotely look like she was paying attention.

---

She was blinded by the light gleaming through the curtains. She shifted her head to stop the burning feeling from having her eyes peer into the daylight. The room was still moderately dark but she could more easily make out the features of the room, the furniture scattered around the edges and the crayon drawings that covered the walls. She could hear someone behind her, their footsteps on the floor, they were coming towards her but she already knew they were Hoppers.

"Ah, you've finally awoken, how you doing kid?" asked Hopper, leaning up against the wall to face her.

"Tired," she replied, smiling up at him. His hair was wet, he must have just had a shower, something she really wanted, almost as much as...

"There's some food left on the table," he'd read her mind, "I'm amazed your still tired, it's gone twelve o'clock," joked Hopper. This was good news, Mike finished school at around three o'clock, she wouldn't have to wait long to see him.

"Have you got to go?" she asked.

"No, I told the station I've been ill, I'll go in tomorrow," Hopper replied, pushing himself off of the wall. "Apparently, nothing's happened in Hawkins over the last few days according to what the police know." chatted Hopper, making his way towards the kitchen, making himself louder as he walked further away.

"Can we get Mike?" asked El, as he re-entered the room carrying a tray with toast and spreads.

"I'm guessing you mean after school, not right now?" asked Hopper, which El replied to with a small nod as she sat up to receive the tray being passed to her. "Sure, I think I should take you home first though," responded Hopper. "We shouldn't risk taking you to the school, and I shouldn't leave you here with Joyce, not with what she's going through." El understood, mostly, she thought it would be fine

to go to the school but she didn't feel like arguing.

"Okay," El said, before biting into her toast.

"Once you've finished that go have a shower, we've got some tidying to do before we leave. I'm guessing the cabins still a mess?" asked Hopper, who received a guilty nod as a reply. "That's fine, it just means we've got twice the work to do."

---

He couldn't believe this had happened, they had all fallen asleep. Lucas and Dustin rocked up just before second period, and after hearing that El was okay, tried to get away with dosing through English class, which was not possible with Mr Ryder picking on them to answer questions and read extracts. They hadn't had any success during their other lessons and by lunch all three of them were asleep in the AV club room. Mike didn't know how they could all sleep after what happened yesterday, but maybe that was the reason they were asleep.

Mike was too preoccupied to consider sleeping, not that he felt like he needed to anyway. El was back now, everything was better, but for how long. Mike was going to see El later, but that might not last forever, Hopper might decide to hide her again, to stop them all seeing her again. Hopper wasn't stupid, and Mike knew he did what was right, most of the time, hiding her made sense, but not from her friends, and definitely not know they knew she was alive.

If Nancy had somehow gotten rid of Hawkins lab, El would more likely be safe, but they could always come back, or come to find her if they knew she was alive. Dr Owens knew she was alive, plus their security cameras would have been connected to the backup generator as Owens was using them when the power was out. They needed to get rid of evidence she was there, and quickly.

"Mike, are you alright?" whispered Mr Clark, poking his head through the door. He must have been trying to get his attention, Mike responded with a nod. "Good, were you guys up late last night?"

"Yes sir, we were... we were finishing all our homework," insisted Mike.

"Come on Michael, you don't have to pretend to me you were up late doing homework, I was a kid too once," he informed.

"Well, we were up creating Max a character, for our campaigns," fabricated Mike.

"Ah, yes, it's good that you've all made Maxine feel welcome. She's only been here a week and already you've made her a character. I used to play a paladin when the game first came out, what's her class?"

"Well, she wanted to be a Zoomer but as it doesn't exist we've settled on a fighter with added dexterity," formulated Mike, relying on his quick improvisation skills needed when being Dustin's Dungeon Master.

"That sounds like fun, maybe we should start a club here at the school. I've got to go prepare for my next lesson, but if the others want to continue napping, make sure you wake them up for their next lesson," mumbled Mr Clark. "Oh, and Michael, if you need to talk, about whatever, you know where my room is," he added before softly shutting the door.

Mr Clark was the best teacher Mike had ever had, he genuinely seemed to care about his students. But Mike couldn't tell him anything, it was all too complicated and unbelievable, at least he'd momentarily forgotten that El could be in danger again, and that they had to act fast to prevent the worst.

---

These demo-gorgons were nowhere near as terrifying as the fully-grown thing, they didn't travel between the dimensions, they weren't very tall, and were all currently dead. Hopper had been digging some holes away from the house to put the corpses in, while El moved them over, electing not to use her powers, but instead a wheelbarrow. There were seven of them scattered around the front of the house, and one inside the fridge for some reason. She had to jam one at a time into the barrow using some yellow gloves she'd found lying on a table, they weren't particularly heavy but she wanted to make the smallest amount of mess on the ground and on herself. She was taking the final one over to Hopper now, who was digging his

sixth hole.

"Grab that shovel and dig over there kid," instructed Hopper, pointing to a spot near a large tree. "I'm trying to keep the holes as small as possible so they're harder to spot, hopefully Joyce will forget they're here, so just don't tell her where they're buried," he asked, walking over to the remaining pile of bodies and dragging one into his hole. She watched as he filled dirt back into the hole, stomped on it with his foot, then added more dirt on top to flatten the ground.

By the time she'd finished digging a hole deep enough, Hopper had finished burying the seventh. He dumped the final corpse in the hole and proceed to carefully cover it, trying to make the ground above look as natural as before.

"Good job kid, hopefully nobody will find these, they're not too far from the house but they should be covered well enough not to be found," said Hopper as she passed him her shovel. "Can you spread out the remaining dirt," he asked, as he headed towards the byers shed, to continue replacing the objects in there that were still piled up outside. El swept the remaining dirt, not taking her long to make the plots almost unrecognisable.

The Byers shed was still covered inside, but their priority was putting everything back in case it rained. Once they had relocated the pile of things from outside to a pile of things inside the shed, they re-entered the house. Before they left, Hopper wanted to check that Will and Joyce were okay, so as Hopper went to Will's room, El piled up the crayon drawings from the floor and lower wall, moving the furniture back into place. The room was still far from tidy, but it was going to take a lot of work to clean it all up, not to mention fixing the hole in the side of the house, which she only felt half responsible for.

A few minutes later Hopper returned, "We better get you home if I have to pick Mike up," he said, grabbing his keys from the table. She still didn't want to be left to tidy the cabin, but last time she left home it didn't go so well, plus she was definitely responsible for that one.

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"Look Mike, we were tired, it doesn't mean we don't care. But to be



honest, I don't see what the problem is," reassured Dustin.

"How can you not think Nancy and Jonathan creating an incriminating tape against the lab is a terrible idea, any number of things could lead the lab back to them," reasoned Mike. "The lab came to all our houses, bugged our phones, they had cameras and security, how isn't it worrying you that they'll know to come after them."

"Because everyone who worked at that lab is dead, right. You said the power outage stopped people from leaving, so therefore nobody got out who can identify Nancy and Jonathan as being there. Plus, they probably care more about covering up all the people who died," said Lucas.

"Dr Owens is in the hospital, the tape recording is of him, he will know it's from his conversation with them. We need to erase all of the labs recordings and log entries of the past week before more of them come back to the facility," retorted Mike. He didn't understand how they weren't scared of what the lab would do, he didn't understand how they weren't worried about what could happen next.

"Are we still going over to Wills?" asked Max, changing the subject.

"Yeah, Steve's going to give us a lift," replied Dustin. "Hey Mike, are you coming or not?"

"Um, no. I'll meet you there later, okay," said Mike. They didn't think anything of it as they wandered towards Steve's car. Once they had lost sight of him through the crowd, Mike headed towards the car with 'HAWKINS POLICE DEPT' written on it, parked opposite the school exit, which only he had apparently spotted. Unsurprisingly, Hopper was smoking a cigarette, leaning against the side of the vehicle, but before Mike could reach him, Hopper made his way across the vehicle to get inside.

Mike got into the car and was relieved not to find El there, even if he'd wished she was. "Where's El?" Mike asked, while Hopper snuffed out his cigarette.

"She's at Home, clearing up the mess she made after going to see

you," replied Hopper.

"She told me about that, she told me you had an argument."

"Yeah, bet she chose to exclude the part where she almost brought the house down," said Hopper, seemingly not ready to laugh about it yet.

"Are you taking me to see her?" asked Mike, cutting to the important questions.

"Depends whether or not I can trust you?" stated Hopper.

"Trust me, I'm not the one who gave her up when looking for Will." responded Mike, perplexed.

"I had no choice, we've moved past that anyway. But how do I know you won't talk if questioned?" asked Hopper.

"Because I won't, I haven't told anybody anything over the past year," offered Mike.

"Yeah, well if they find out where she is because you talked, monsters from another dimension will be the least of your worries."

"Good to know," replied Mike, unphased, "now let's go, we need to discuss getting back into Hawkins labs before reinforcements arrive."

"Yeah, and why would we want to do that?" questioned Hopper.

"Because there are cameras throughout the lab which are connected to the backup generator, cameras which footage will be backed up onsite and the first thing they retrieve. That won't only show you and El in the lab, but also Nancy and Jonathan."

"They're not going to care about Nancy and Jonathan Mike, don't worry about them," reassured Hopper.

"Not after they acquired incriminating evidence against the lab which they've had sent to multiple news companies." Hopper was speechless to this news, "Yeah, how stupid were they. We should get El and go to Dr Owens, to see if he'll tell us where they keep the footage and

when the clean-up crew will be arriving."

Hopper started the engine and began the drive towards El.

## 5. Chapter Five: The Mess

### Chapter Five: The Mess

"So, Nancy and Jonathan went to Hawkins lab, recorded some unbelievable incriminating evidence, then took it to a guy called Murray and sent a believable version to a load of newspaper outlets," sighed Hopper.

"She just said they sent evidence, presumably to a news outlet," replied Mike.

"The guy was definitely called Murray, right?" which Mike replied to with a nod. "Then if I know Murray as many news outlets that he could think of have this evidence and will probably already have it in their lineup for tomorrow's news," Hopper verbally hypothesized. "Why did they do this now, did they say anything else?"

"No, other than for Barbara and Will according to Nancy," said Mike.

Although what they did was stupid, it was smart and might just work, although he was going to vent his frustrations of not being total idiots later. If he could hide their involvement by destroying the camera footage, which he needed to do because of El as well, this could be a good thing. It was still a stupid risk to take, but it might have just paid off.

"Your sister and Jonathan may have done something smart or stupid," said Hopper to Mike's surprise. "If I can get into the lab and destroy the footage of them being there, along with the footage of El, we might just get away with it."

"How can you call it smart, if the lab finds out it's them then we're all screwed!" complained Mike. Although he was right, Hopper knew destroying the evidence shouldn't be too hard, all he had to do was infiltrate a shady government facility and destroy their security, what was difficult about that he thought amusing himself.

"I know, but think about it, no lab means El can be free, she can have a normal life," explained Hopper.

"I know that, but they'll come back or come for her now they know she's alive," argued Mike.

"The only one who knows she's alive is Owens and I don't think he'll give her up. You've met the guy, he's not like the others, he cares. Plus, I can make sure he never says anything," suggested Hopper, he knew Owens would see reason if it came to it.

"And you don't think they'll link the gate being closed to her?" asked said Mike.

"Listen Mike, it's all going to be fine. I'm going to destroy the tapes of El and anyone else being there, they're not going to know it was her and they're not going to find her because I am going to keep her safe, like I have for the last year."

"So, you're going to keep her prisoner in the middle of nowhere again, not letting us see her."

"Well, no. I mean she can't exactly start going out to the movies or go around your house or anything of the sort. But maybe one day she can, if it all works out she can finally have the life she deserves. For now, we need to see what happens and when the dust settles we can really start to give her the life she deserves." He truly believed this, that it could a get better from here.

"So, nothing's changed, you are just going to hide her away again."

"No, are you not paying attention, we are literally getting out of the car to go see her right now," said Hopper as he stopped the car by the side of the road.

"But after this you're just going to..."

"Jesus Mike do you ever stop. I am not going to stop you seeing your girlfriend alright, that's all you really care about," interrupted Hopper, shutting him up.

"No," said Mike, clearly perplexed with his sudden attack. "All I want is for her to be happy... all I want for her is for her to decide things for herself, not for you to force her to do what you think is best because it's not. It's important she's safe but it's also important she

can have a life where she isn't a prisoner." argued Mike.

"And your intentions are only in her best interests. You just want to continue manipulating her, so you can brag to your friends and have her protect you from the bullies because you're too weak to protect yourself."

"No... no I have never done that, I never would, especially not to El, not to anybody. What is wrong with you!"

"What's wrong with me?' Why do you let her think you care when all you want to do is use her just like everybody else, you're no better than the people who tortured her!"

"Why are you doing this, you know I wouldn't do anything to hurt her. You know better than that, this is just a cruel test to see if you can trust me."

"Well done kid," revealed Hopper, "I'll take you to see her."

"What the hell, that was messed up," argued Mike, clearly angry at what had just happened.

"Yeah, well I needed to make sure you had El's best interests in mind. I don't want you taking advantage of her, I didn't think you would, but I needed to be sure," answered Hopper, "and now I am."

"So, you thought I might have before, after I helped her escape from people who wanted to capture her and kill us, even though we had only just met," reasoned Mike.

"Hey, you can never be too careful. I could have let you and your friends come here to see her every day for Dinner, but it was too risky, I couldn't afford to take the risk.

"So, is this some sort of goodbye then, you're going to move her to another secluded cabin and maybe you'll let us see her once a year or something?" worried Mike.

"No, you can come and see her whenever you want, once I show you where to go," said Hopper as he started the engine back up. "I trust you Mike and I want things to be different than before. For now, you

must agree the best thing is to keep her in a hidden place, somewhere only a few people know about,"

"So, we can come and see her as much as we want?" asked Mike, showing less anger and more relief.

"No." replied Hopper. He didn't like being the bad guy, but it seemed to be his role more often than not. "I don't want your friends knowing where this cabin is, I think having a place that as few people know about is for the best. I'm not trying to keep you all separated intentionally, but do you really trust your friends not to give this place away."

"Yeah, you can trust the others, they'd never give El up."

"But can you be one hundred percent sure they wouldn't reveal it. I mean I still don't know who that ginger haired girl is, but somebody obviously told her things they weren't meant to. It comes down to whether you would trust them to keep a secret, even if they were under duress.

"You don't think people would torture us for information do you," asked Mike, not seeming worried he could be tortured, rather interested in whether Hawkins Lab was even capable of such a thing.

"I mean they were prepared to leave Will in the Upside Down to die, they do not seem too worried about morals. I get the feeling you would hold out, although I hope and doubt you will ever have to, but if you think your friends could even accidentally let slip something crucial, then it would be better not to risk it." Hopper knew it was improbable the kids would ever come to harm from the lab, but he knew they wouldn't have problems in scaring them to get what they needed. Mike was tough though, he was far more mature than the others, even a year ago Hopper could tell he was the mature one.

Mike sat quietly for a moment and Hopper could see he was thinking about it as they drove off the road and towards the real location of the cabin. "You may be right," admitted Mike after some consideration, "they managed to tell Max everything within a week. As Long as El can still see them, maybe at Joyce's or something, that might be better."

"That sounds like an idea," said Hopper, pulling up onto the hill, close to the cabin. "Although you can ride it, I'm not giving you a lift every time you want to come around, it shouldn't take you more than fifteen minutes from school," guessed Hopper.

They continued the rest of the journey to the cabin on foot, Hopper explaining the cabin to Mike. "The closest places to here are Sattler's quarry to the north and Kerley boulevard to the East but there isn't an easy road access. People still think I live in my trailer, I go over a couple times a week to get my mail, it's a useful cover as the place is desolate, nobody's noticed that I haven't lived there for about a year. Trestle road is about a mile north, so it shouldn't be a problem people wondering down and finding this place, it's so old it's not on any recent map or town planning documents and it never was, basically it doesn't exist."

"So, the lab wouldn't know about this place or be able to find it, not even with Aerial images?" said Mike. This kid could be more paranoid than himself sometimes.

"You haven't seen it yet it's only small, plus the surrounding trees would obscure it from a satellite image," added Hopper.

"And you're not worried about being followed?"

"They don't suspect me, I've been keeping there shit out of the public knowledge, why would they think I'd be hiding someone they don't even know is alive. Speaking of," said Hopper, indicating towards the now distantly visible cabin, where he could see El sitting on the rickety porch fence.

They continued approaching the cabin, although it was clear to Hopper Mike had subtly picked up the pace once he had seen El, less subtly once he bounded up the stairs and enfolded her in his arms, nearly knocking them over. Hopper wasn't as annoyed seeing this as he thought he would be, although he didn't quite know why he would be annoyed by it in the first place, other than it almost getting her caught a few days ago, hopefully something they would avoid now.

"I need to grab some things that were under my bed, have you seen a



dark wooden box?" asked Hopper while opening the door to reveal the cabin which appeared to have been reorganized without much organization. "If you two are done kissing, help me find my supplies," teased Hopper, shocking the duo who hadn't been but looked as red with embarrassment as if they had, as they awkwardly headed into the cabin.

His crate hadn't been moved, just everything else around it. From inside he took some three fifty-seven ammunition for his revolver, choosing to leave the shells, hoping he wouldn't need them on what he presumed would be a simple, quiet operation.

Closing his container, he could hear Mike explaining the situation to El over by the table. "So, if we don't destroy the camera footage the lab will know your alive, so we need to go and ask Doctor Owens where all of the copies are kept," said Mike to a focused El.

"I hope by 'we' you mean me, you two can stay here and put all this stuff back," instructed Hopper, grabbing his coat from the couch arm.

"No", interjected El, standing up from her seat, "I will come."

"Stay here, catch up and watch some TV or something I won't be long," said Hopper, realizing the Tv wasn't working and hoping El didn't remember before he left.

"What if they're back?" said Mike, "What are you going to do then,"

"When I see Dr Owens, I can ask if they're back, if they are we'll figure it out. Taking you two wouldn't solve anything, you're not exactly a fighter kid and neither are you El in this condition," said Hopper. He knew she would probably manage using her powers already, but he didn't feel it necessary to test such a dangerous theory. "I'll make contact at the hospital so keep the radio on," he said as he opened the door, "and no..." Hopper cut-off realizing it wasn't for him to say, and shut the door leaving two perplexed kids.

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The cabin was propelled into quiet, they stood in tranquility. There was nothing awkward about the silence, or any rush to fill the void, it was nice. Without a word she walked over to the couch with Mike in

tow, slowly dropping onto the cushions with him gently sitting beside her.

"What should we do?" asked Mike, looking around at the disarray of the cabin. El didn't want to tidy the cabin again, she had already done it... mostly, a few days ago, at least it wasn't in the state it was then. But she owed Hopper to clean it up, it wasn't like she had finished it the first time anyway.

They began by grabbing things off the floor, moving them onto the couches or tables. "Mike," said El, knelt on the floor beside him after a few tedious minutes of moving items from the floor.

"Yes El?" respond Mike quietly.

"Did the bad men hurt you?"

"No, El, of course they didn't," said Mike, placing the last item within reach onto the table. She could see him thinking about it for a second, "Were you there, outside my house?" asked Mike.

"Yes," replied El. She hadn't known if he'd actually seen her, it was so dark.

"And you got away alright?" said Mike, sounding concerned.

"Yes."

"Thank God. I thought I was seeing things, they thought I was too after they went out to find someone they thought I'd seen, what happened?"

"I ran."

"But before that, how did you get there, where did you go?" asked Mike, sounding worried.

"To the Upside Down, but I escaped," explained El, realizing she probably just did what Hopper had described as 'pointing out the obvious'.

"So... after you left the Upside Down, and you ran from them and

found Hopper?" asked Mike, moving over to the couch, indicating for her to sit down. She followed along, clearing a space to sit near him.

"No, I hid in the woods... until Hopper found me," said El.

"Wasn't it cold?" which El replied too with a shrug, she didn't really remember it being cold.

"How long was it until Hopper found you?"

"Twenty-eight Days", said El simply. Although she didn't think much of it, Mike appeared stunned.

"You were in the woods for twenty-eight days, you should have come back," said Mike, looking like he'd done something wrong.

"Wasn't safe."

"We could have figured something out?"

"Wasn't safe," repeated El, "hunter told the police where I stole his coat, Hopper found me,"

There was quiet for a moment while Mike looked over the cabin from his position on the couch. "I'm so sorry El."

"Why?" said El, thoroughly confused, Mike hadn't done anything wrong.

"You've been all alone here every day, instead of with us at school or the arcade. I promise, if you ever want me to come and visit I will, if that's okay with you, of course," to which she provided an excited nod. "Hopefully, one day you won't need to hide here, you can come to school and the arcade with us."

"What is the arcade?" asked El, feeling like a fool for having to ask.

"The arcade is a building with lots of different games in it, but not like board games," said Mike, pointing at the shelf with the dusty game boxes, "they're all electronic and everybody tries to get the highest scores." She didn't really understand what he was talking about, it just sounded like Tv, although she liked the idea of it.

They got back to work clearing the floor while Mike told El all about school and the little Demogorgon Dustin found. She listened intently, it all sounded so interesting and now she really wanted to go to school with them, to try all the different things and learn more about... well everything. During the process of moving Hoppers bed back to its normal position and tidying up the items which had been laid out across the floor, El recounted her time in the woods, what she had learnt from Hopper and her time in Chicago, skipping some of the worst bits. Mike was good at listening and didn't mind when she couldn't find a word.

Finally, the job was done, the furniture was back in place, the items on the floor had found a place, lots of heaters were stacked up in the corner to go back to Joyce's house and they were sat in front of the Tv which didn't work because Hopper had broken it. El had cleared the files away before Mike had arrived, Hopper didn't notice them when he dropped her off, but they weren't in the order they were before, at least none of them had been stood on or lost, or at least she didn't think any had been lost. The holes where the windows went were still empty, although Hopper said he had a friend from the city who could fix them, which would be safer than somebody from the town doing it.

They both sat down again and marveled in their work of making the cabin look better than it ever had before, except for the missing windows of course. The cabin really felt like home now, it wasn't her prison anymore. She knew only Mike would be able to see her here, but she would see the others at Joyce's, and having Mike back was good enough for her.

The silent appreciation of their work was interrupted by the static noise of the radio, causing them both to bolt upright to hear what was coming through. "Kids do you copy, over. We have a problem, over."

## 6. Chapter Six: Decisions

### Chapter Six: Decisions

He couldn't believe this, he didn't know how it had happened, he was going to be killed for sure. Steve didn't know how Dustin had talked his way into getting his and Lucas's bikes into the trunk of the car, or how he had been caught in the middle of a rather loud and long argument which he couldn't even remember the point of, but it had happened and was exactly what he deserved for helping out a bunch of eighth graders.

"How can you possibly think a skateboard is better than a bike, it is clearly worse in every way," argued Dustin. "You can't go anywhere on it without getting tired from practically walking, it's just walking with extra steps."

"What about in school, you can't ride your bike in school, but I can ride my board," said Max.

"No, you can't, Miss Bowen caught you from the other side of the hall and would have given you detention if she knew who you were," retorted Dustin.

"So, it just shows how much cooler having a board is, I bet you and your stupid bike have never gotten a detention," suggested Max.

"Actually I did once, for crashing into lunch lady Phyllis... on my bike," admitted Dustin.

"Really, how could my board be any worse than that, I've never crashed into anyone I haven't wanted to."

"Yeah well Lucas, back me up, you're always riding your bike with us," reasoned Dustin.

"I mean... I like my bike, but skateboarding does look pretty cool."

"Lucas, you own a bike, you're on my side no matter what your girlfriend says," complained Dustin. Lucas immediately looked anxious, but Max didn't seem phased.

"So now there's sides," started Max, "is there going to be a school war over which is better? Everyone who owns a bike at school spend their weekends shopping for dresses and chatting about boys. People who own skateboards have the top scores on the machines and steal your lunch money, it wouldn't be a long one."

And so, the fighting continued over which was better and Steve had no idea why he was allowing any of it, he was driving them after all so clearly the car was better, although he didn't want to get involved. Why did he have to get stuck with what appeared to be the three loudest kids, he would prefer being stuck with the creepy magic girl, at least she was quiet.

"Can you shut up now!" yelled Steve over the shrieking that permeated through the vehicle. He'd had a bad enough day as it was, three of his teachers had insisted he visit the nurse's office which housed the least tenderhearted individual he'd ever met. At Least she only did one examination the first time, after that she got him to wait in the corridor for ten minutes to then go back to class with a slip saying he was fine, which he really didn't feel even with the painkillers. At least her lack of personality prevented her from making jokes about it, most of the people who were at one point his friends had started spreading the story that Nancy had done it to him.

"What's wrong Steve, is it because Nancy dumped you for Jonathan?" said Dustin, in front of two now sniggering kids sat in the back of his car.

"Come on man, that is not cool."

"Or is it because you got your face messed up by Billy?" asked Dustin, again not understanding the concept of subtlety.

"Let's just call it a mixture of that and your continued shouting, okay," said Steve.

"Alright Steve, do you want me to tell you some good news?" asked Dustin, looking worryingly cheerful.

"If it's about bikes I swear to God you can ride yours with no wheels," dared Steve.

"Well," continued Dustin, "Nancy and Jonathan got rid of Hawkins Lab for us, isn't that great?"

"What do you mean?" he asked perplexed.

"I mean they got some evidence and sent it somewhere," replied Dustin, somehow not looking worried by what he'd just said.

"What do you mean 'got evidence and sent it somewhere', be more specific!" said Steve, taking a corner a little quicker than he probably should have, causing the body of the car to wobble momentarily.

"I don't know, I wasn't really listening, Mike seemed a little crazy earlier," replied Dustin. "Just ask Nancy, she'll probably be at Will's too."

Steve sped the car up slightly, they weren't far now but he needed to know what they'd done, and how much trouble they were in.

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"Kids do you copy, over. We have a problem, over." repeated Hopper into his radio.

"What's the problem... over," said Mike.

"Owens has told me what happens when a facility like the lab goes dark, over," said Hopper.

After a few moments, "Are we sure we can trust Owens? I mean he seems better than the others, but he did still work at the lab, over?" asked Mike.

"Yes, I believe we can," answered Hopper, believing what he said. Owen's may have been a pain in my ass for the past year, but he was nothing like the rest of that lab, and worlds apart from Dr Brenner. "He helped us escape and he wants to help us now, he can hear you by the way, over," added Hopper.

"Hop, pass me the walkie," said Owens softly, Hopper complied. "Hello Mike, hello Eleven. Now I know you may find it hard to trust me, especially you Eleven. I know it seems like I'm the enemy, but I want you to know I never wanted this job, I was the only one

qualified for it and I had an interest in this other dimension. I only wanted to understand it and stop it from spreading to our world, although I clearly didn't do a great job of that," chuckled Owens. "More importantly though I never wanted to hurt you Eleven, I didn't agree with what Brenner was doing, it's why I wasn't part of his team to begin with. I honestly thought you were dead, and if you weren't then I was glad you weren't at that lab anymore, it wasn't a nice place and I tried to change that, I tried to bring the science back, but Brenner influenced so many there. I hope you'll at least see I regret what has happened to you and that by helping you know I only want what is best."

The radio was silent for a moment, then a moment longer. Hopper knew she would be apprehensive about trusting Owens, but he knew she would soon see he was different from the others.

"I don't think you're going to get a reply Doc, but honestly that's the best you'll receive from her," answered Hopper.

"Okay then, can we get to the problem now, over," questioned Mike through the radio."

"Yes, so after twelve hours of no contact a small unit from nearby is sent to assess the situation, then call for backup if needed. Owens recons they'll call in for a full force, but that will have to come from an installation nearby Nashville, so we should still have a few hours until that gets here. He says the small unit will keep the perimeter but won't re-enter the building until backup arrives, so if we can get past them and into the building before the large team then we can get the tapes and leave, over." Hopper didn't know how much of that they'd gotten, it was a lot to take in and the signal through town was not great, although he had the feeling El had helped by boosting it.

"What do we do then, over," asked Mike.

"I'm not sure," Hopper admitted, "all I've got is sneaking through the fence, but I'd almost definitely be caught if they're patrolling around the building, over."

"The guards will focus on the doors, you could sneak through the fence, but you would need them away to get through a door," said



Owens, quietly from the bed besides Hopper. "Although breaking through the fence will draw attention later."

"What if we had a distraction, over," said Mike through the radio.

"What do you mean 'we', you two aren't going anywhere near that lab, over!" said Hopper firmly.

"Hop, you're the only person who can cause a distracting without being arrested by them. They'll know you're involved with the lab it's in the file, those two will need to go in and destroy the tapes," said Owens.

"That's insane, I'm not sending two kids into a government facility. I'll sneak in and knock a guard out or something... anything is better than sending those two in," argued Hopper.

"If a guard gets knocked out they'll know something's happened, we don't want them to know we purposely destroyed the tapes," warned Mike through the static of the radio, the radio Hopper hadn't been transmitting the conversation with Owen's through.

"How the hell did you..." started Hopper, then noticing the flickering table light, "El, what did I tell you about listening in on people's conversations."

"We can go," came El's voice quietly through the radio.

"No, you can't," replied Hopper, "the reason we're doing this is to cover up the fact that you were there, sending you back is stupid. No, I'll think of something else."

"We don't have time, me and El can do it," argued Mike.

"No, I'm not repeating myself, you cannot go it's stupid and unsafe," reiterated Hopper. He didn't understand how they didn't understand the danger this could put them in.

"If we don't do this then El's going to be found anyway, it's better we take the risk than wait for the lab to get those tapes, if we act fast and sneak in we're safe once we're in the lab," retorted Mike.

"Until the dozens of military police turn up looking to shoot monsters," said Hopper.

"We'll be out before then, come on Hopper, we can do this." Hopper didn't think this was smart or by any means a good idea, but the kid was right, they were running out of time.

"Can't we get your sister to go with you at least?" said Hopper.

"We don't have time to find her, plus she doesn't seem to think it's a big deal. You need us both, El can protect us while I destroy the film." Hopper hated that the kid was right, he probably wouldn't know where to start with destroying tapes beyond fire and scissors.

"El, are you okay to go back," asked Hopper.

"Yes."

"Fine, Doc give them the rundown,"

"Okay then folks, this is what you're dealing with. Two tapes, multiplexing is used so it means you only need those two, backups are made of security footage on Mondays and couriered upstate, meaning we don't need to worry about other copies. The tape with the recording of Eleven will be on the second floor in the recording room, the tape will be in the secondary recorder, not the first giant machine on the left of the room but the smaller machine on the right, it only kicks in when the primary recorder stops, in this case due to the power outage. So, the tape in the secondary recorder will have everything from when the power came back on, which is good. If the main tape is preserved, then it'll look less like anything's been tampered with. The best idea I've got for destroying the tape is by setting the machine on fire," stated Owens with hesitation.

"Whoa Doc, you want them to start a fire?" said Hopper, immediately regretting agreeing to this.

"Yes, it'll be the most believable reason for why the tape is destroyed. The units older and less reliable, I don't think it's been used in years, so it wouldn't be out of place if it appeared faulty."

"Then why not stop the machine and replace the tape with a blank

one, making it look like the machine never started instead?" asked Mike.

Owens took a moment to consider this, "You see Hopper the youth is the future, that's a much better idea, and they're the ones who are meant to act irrationally. Let me think, the tape with Nancy and Jonathan on will be in the storage room next door, you could make it look like the creatures got in and destroyed the room, but it will draw suspicion if you cut the tape you need out, you'll have to completely destroy that tape in a believable way," pondered Owens.

"Couldn't we demagnetize some of the tape?" asked Mike.

"Maybe, it'd take some strong magnets and a bit of time... but if you shred it and a few other tapes, then demagnetize it and some others then it'll look like it was destroyed by the creatures and be completely unrecoverable. Excellent thinking Mikey, that's two for two," praised Owens. "There are some strong enough magnets in the storage room exactly for that reason."

"What about a log book, is there another record of them being in the lab?" asked Hopper.

"No, I made sure to keep it out of the books, didn't see the point making the security team more paranoid," answered Owens.

"Okay then, for lack of a better idea we're sending two kids into a facility soon to be swarming with trigger-happy soldiers," Hopper said, wearing his worry.

"It'll be fine Chief, Mike seems smarter than both of us and Eleven could bring that whole building down," reassured Owens, covering the microphone portion of the radio. Only it wasn't reassuring, Hopper knew they were both stubborn and wouldn't leave until it was done, no matter what. "Oh, and while your there, a list of all the bugs planted through Hawkins will be on the first floor in an office to the left of the main staircase, and you can find the recording room by checking the maps on that floor," added Owens.

"Great, something else for them to do," said Hopper. "What am I doing then, how do I distract them, and how are they getting in?"

asked Hopper.

"I have some ideas," responded Mike.

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"Bloody hell Steve are you trying to launch us through the window?" yelled Dustin as the car abruptly stopped in front of the Byers house.

"Yes, now go be noisy somewhere else, alright," said Steve, irritated by both his swelling and a newly developed headache.

"Jeez, no need to be so grouchy," said Dustin, stepping out of the car and towards the Byers house.

The kids rushed inside but Steve sat there for a moment, it was quiet in his car and the autumn cold felt nice against his swollen eye. After a few precious minutes of tranquility, he saw the door open and Nancy step out, he proceeded to get out of the car and walk towards her.

"Hi Steve, what are you doing out here?"

"Did you and Jonathan send a bunch of information off to newspapers about Hawkins labs?" asked Steve, cutting straight to the point.

"Kind of, we sent enough evidence to prove they killed Barb, but nothing unbelievable though," said Nancy.

"And that makes it better, you've messed with the people who can literally make us disappear. What are they going to do to us Nancy when they find out?"

"Nothing don't worry about it, they're not going to find out, you sound like Mike," said Nancy, visibly irritated defending her choice to do this.

"This is great, just great, exactly what I needed. Not only have you been lying to me but have also put us all in danger without considering how it will mess our lives up."

"Steve, drop it."

"No Nancy, you drop it! Don't pretend like you thought this through, you did this without thinking of others," argued Steve.

"I was thinking about Barbara, about her family who were going to ruin their lives for no reason, which you didn't care about!" retorted Nancy.

"Of Course, I care, but there was nothing we could do that made it any better for all of us," replied Steve. "I need to go, goodbye Nancy."

"Wait Steve, I'm sorry but we had to try," said Nancy while Steve entered his car. "Steve I'm sorry." Steve started his car and drove off to the setting sun.

## 7. Chapter Seven: Covering Tracks

### Chapter Seven: Covering Tracks

It had just gone six and the sun had already set, he preferred when the sun set early in the later months. Hawkins had an especially low crime rate, something he should be proud of, but often Hoppers job was boring and entailed very little police work and much more waiting for something to do. His last year hadn't provided much more police work apart from visiting Hawkins labs to deal with Will, but that wasn't even really police work, just something else he had to do. What had preoccupied his time was El.

She knew very little about the world around her, she doesn't understand many of its intricacies, yet she had experienced things nobody else had and could do things others never would. Although she had gone through hell in the lab looming in front of him, she was still willing to go back to do something that needed to be done. She could have allowed Hopper to figure a different way in, but she didn't hesitate to do something right even though she didn't fully understand the reasons for doing them other than that if they didn't things could be bad for people, including him.

Her bravery was admirable but also worrying, her lacking knowledge would seem scary to most, but it never seemed to affect her. She was never embarrassed to ask about things or to get something wrong, she had a strong center which is what he admired most. But this wasn't the time to think about this, now he had to do his job.

"Whoa, Chief Hopper," he said to the Glock wielding agents as he exited his car, showing he wasn't armed. "Dr Owens sent me here to see you, I've been helping the lab with a few things over the past year, he's asked me to take you to him," he explained to the men standing guard.

"Where is he?" asked one of the three agents stood at the base of the building. Hopper had spotted four cars in the parking lot with him, so there would probably be eight to sixteen agents here, but he didn't think he'd find out until he got them to Owens.

"He's in the hospital, one of those things got him pretty bad. He wants to explain it to you himself," said Hopper, noting the torch light coming from the other two side he could see, they really were doing as Owens said, guarding all of the entrances and exits.

"What are those things?" asked a different, larger agent with a deeper voice than the first.

"How much do you know about what happens here?" asked Hopper to the response of a few blank faces. "I'm not sure I can tell you, you'll have to ask Owens, but I can tell you it's pretty unbelievable stuff." Owens was right about the agents not knowing anything about what the lab did here, although one of them should be clued in according to what he had been told. "So, have you got a superior or someone I can talk to?" inquired Hopper.

"I think you mean me," said a tall, thin looking man approaching from the left side of the building from where Hopper was, followed by an agent carrying an automatic rifle. "Where is Dr Sam Owens?"

"According to the chief he's in the hospital sir," answered the third agent who had been quiet so far. This man was shorter and looked considerably younger than the other two he had been stationed with.

"I want you down on the front entrance now," ordered the supervisor, pointing at the younger man who immediately proceeded to do as demanded. "You must be Jim Hopper, I've seen your name associated with this facility," stated the man, failing to introduce himself. "I want you to take me and my colleague here to question Dr Owens."

"If you say so, but you are not taking guns into a hospital," said Hopper, stepping back over towards his door. "Do you need me to get a few officers around the facility," said Hopper as perceivably a genuine question.

"No, we've got guards patrolling every exit. We need you to lead us to the hospital," instructed the leading agent. That was what Hopper needed, someone too proud to realise they were being played.

"Fine, I'll make sure no one from the station asks for me then," responded Hopper, stepping into his cruiser and shutting the door

while watching the two men go towards a car. Hopper grabbed his walkie instead of the vehicle's transmitter, pressing the transmit button twice with quick succession, then again after a few seconds of silence.

"Receiving, over," whispered Mike into his radio.

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"There's one guard on their way down, hurry," came Hoppers voice through the radio. El didn't need Mike to say anything as she scrambled forwards through the storm drain out onto the exposed hill outside the front of the facility. Her eyes had adjusted to the light when waiting at the end of the tunnel but the cold smothered her as she flung herself into the grass.

She hates this place, coming back yesterday hadn't changed that or the fact there was nobody inside. If they were successful then she would never have to come back here, but if they weren't then they'd need to get as far away as they could. Seconds after clambering onto the cold grass to stay hidden Mike was besides her. "Okay...", there was a short silent pause as he listened, "go," he said, and they ran for the entrance. They were concealed from the guard by part of the building as he strolled around, but they had to be quick to not get caught.

They reached the door after a few seconds of sprinting, Mike pulled the door open enough for them to squeeze through and ensured it closed silently. They quickly dashed for the hallway and only seconds after they darted behind a wall did the guards torch light shine through the big glass door.

They were in the clear for now, the agents wouldn't come back in unless they were told to, which they wouldn't be until their military back up arrived. They had to travel up the once bland facility, now with walls smeared in blood and floors covered in bodies, led by the torches Mike had brought in his backpack. They hadn't gotten far before finding a lab scientist with scratches across his torso and bite marks around one of their legs. Although these people had been part in tormenting her for a huge amount of her life, they didn't deserve to die like this.



They continued through the corridors lit by their torchlight, shortly reaching the main staircase near the center of the building. Climbing up a floor and exiting through the door gave them an office on the left besides the staircase where the list should be, and fire escape maps for each floor besides the door which showed the recording room to be in one of the corners of the second floor. She entered the office and began searching the desk for a list, Owens said it would be in here, but he hadn't said where. Mike entered after noting the directions to the recording room from the map and began searching through one of the filing cabinets. A few minutes later he found it in the second cabinet while she had been searching through files on shelves, with that they left leaving the small office the same apart from taking a copy of the list they had come for.

"Left here," instructed Mike once they were on the second floor. In all the years she lived here she had never come this far up the building, she hadn't even made it to the floor they were just on. She had resided in a secure area on the ground floor of the facility and gone to the basement for experiments occasionally, that was all she had known for most of her life.

"Right here," said Mike again as they continued towards the room. They weren't speaking much, there was too much tension, this could go wrong for them and there was too much on the line. El didn't even know what they would talk about anyway, they had filled in the gaps for each other of the last year what else could they talk about. It didn't trouble her though, they didn't need to always talk like their friends did, sometimes it was nice to be quiet together, they often were before she had gone, when she was living in his basement. She missed her blanket fort and being able to see Mike everyday around school, hopefully that would not change, apart from now she had a bed and a home where she didn't have to hide, at least not from the people in the house.

Finally, after a minute of walking they were there, at the rooms, one labeled 'Recording Room', the other 'Recording Room Storage'. They had already decided their strategy on their journey here, Mike would mess with the recording machine while El found the tapes they needed, once that was done, he would use some magnets to destroy what was on the tapes while she devastated the room.

"El could you find the magnets as well before you start smashing the room up please?" asked Mike. She responded with a nod and he left the storage room with the blank tape he needed. Her search for the tape wasn't long, she quickly found the one with '11/02/84' on the label, it was on top of a pile near the door in a pile marked for copying, well it was too late for that now. She threw the tape out the door and went to the other side of the room where on a small shelf sat many items, batteries, tape cartridges and much more like pens and scissors. It took her a minute to spot the rather large magnets in an opened box on the shelf.

She left the room and found Mike on the floor holding the tape cartridge, she handed him the magnet box, "thank you," he said looking at the cartridge in his hands. "El, I'm not sure these magnets will be quick enough to destroy lots of tapes in the time we have. If I can create an electromagnet, I can speed up the process though, why didn't I think of that before?" said Mike, El still not quite sure why people asked questions they didn't want answered but at least she didn't have to pretend to know what an electromagnet was. "Have you seen any wire and batteries?" asked Mike.

"I have seen batteries, no wire," replied El. She went back to the room and retrieved the batteries.

"Thank you, now we just need some wire," Mike pondered aloud. She knew that electronics had wires in, like the Tv, and that wire gave them electricity that powered said Tv and lights, but that was all she remembered from what Hopper had told her. "The recorder will have wire in," said Mike ecstatically after a moment of thought, "pick a few more tapes out that could have been destroyed, I'll get some wire," he said before dashing off to the recording room. She grabbed a few tapes from multiple shelves and placed them outside the room for Mike.

Now she had to destroy the room which sounded like work that came naturally to her, until Mike had told her during the journey that they couldn't make too much noise. So, she got to work causing chaos to the storage room in a quiet manner, pushing over a couple of racks after throwing each item onto the floor. It took a long time, but she had made it look like one side of the room had been trashed, with dents made in the bottom of cabinets and tapes strewn across the

floor, even forcing a dent into the door with her powers to make it look like it had been forced into. Now she needed to give it a reason to have been trashed in the first place.

Mike was finished with the tapes now, chucking them to different parts of the messy floor as she walked down the hallway towards the staircase. They had passed a scientist on the way and she was going to move her into the storage room. Once she reached the body, she levitated the woman and moved her back down the corridor she had come from. El remembered this woman, she had only ever seen her in the corridor when she was being moved between rooms. She wasn't a kind looking Woman, she wore the same miserable expression every time El had seen her, but it didn't make it any better that they were now moving her lifeless body.

Mike stood back and watched as she slowly passed her through the door frame and positioned her against the far wall from the door. The scientist had not bled out, so there was no sign that she had been moved, something Mike said could be crucial while crawling through the tunnel earlier.

They were finally done, it seemed like they had been here forever even though it couldn't have been more than half an hour. They left the room now in disarray, Mike putting his electromagnet into his rucksack. They headed back towards the staircase, they knew they didn't have long but the radio going off suddenly confirmed their worst fears.

"You two need to get out of there now, they're going to enter the building," said Owens through the radio, coming as a surprise to them both. They sprinted down the hall and started their descent, she was sure they would have had more time than this. All they could do now was hope they make it to the tunnels before the soldiers did or they would have no way out without a fight.

They practically leaped down the first level, hoping to make it the whole way down before the soldiers reached them, but they weren't quick enough, they could hear soldiers at the base of the staircase and see their torchlight shining on the wall below them. The stairwell had two sets of stairs between each floor, meaning they were hiding directly above the soldiers. Once the soldiers came up the first half of

the stairwell though, they would see them crouched behind the steps, she thought the best option was to go through the first floor and try and find another way down.

"El we can't, they'll search the whole floor and have the stairwells blocked," Mike whispered to her as she went for the door behind her. So, they couldn't hide as they would be found, or escape because the exits were blocked, their only option was to head further up the facility to delay being captured. "El, come on we need to head up," he whispered to her again. It would only delay them being captured though, it wasn't good enough, she knew had to fight them.

"Mike, get ready to run," she said as she stood up. She could hear more of them approaching now, she could tell they were about to start coming up, if she could deal with them then Mike might still be able to make it to the tunnels to escape while she distracted them.

"El no, we need to hide," he said as he rose beside her. He knew what she wanted him to do without her even having to explain it, but he had grabbed her arm to stop her from going. "El I'm not going without you, come on Hopper will be here soon," he begged her, trying to tug her up to the top of the tower but she wouldn't move. She would have loved to go with him and wait for Hopper, but she couldn't let them find him here, she knew she could cause a big enough distraction to get him out of here, but she needed to act now.

As she took her first step down towards the soldiers, she knew they wouldn't see her until she had started to round the staircase, Mike was out of sight on the stairs above them so if she could push any soldiers away from the stairwell entrance, he would be safe to escape. She didn't want it to end like this but what else could she do, wait for them both to be found by the bad men, she didn't want that for Mike. Before she could take her second step downwards though, something happened.

## **8. Chapter Eight: Accidental Rescue**

### **Chapter Eight: Accidental Rescue**

Why wouldn't these guys have some sense of urgency. Hopper was stuck behind the two agents he had led to the hospital, tailing right behind them on their way back towards the lab. The agents got the call that their backup had arrived while in the room with Owens, they decided they would come back later to hear the rest of his story once they had completed their inspection of the building. Instead of initiating the sweep once they arrived at the lab though, the lead agent had instructed them to begin, meaning that El and Mike had no idea that it was happening. Luckily they did this all in the room with Owens, so when Hopper snuck his radio to him before leaving he knew what to do.

That's if Owens wasn't playing him, he could be helping them until his people arrived, but then he didn't give away El yet and Hopper still trusted him, so he just had to have faith that he reached them with enough time to escape if they hadn't already. Of Course Hopper now knew nothing of the situation taking place, he didn't know if the kids had escaped before the soldiers arrived or if the soldiers had found them, he just had to hope they could handle themselves until he got there.

It was irresponsible of him to let them go into that lab, knowing that there was such a high chance of something going wrong. This was meant to ensure her safety and it could have led to her being captured or even killed, he wouldn't know until he got there. He had told the agents he was going back to find out what they found, whether the creatures were dead or not, he didn't know if they believed him though, the man in charge would ignore Hoppers remarks of the events, asking Owens to explain them himself.

He had made sure beforehand that Owens didn't tell them the creatures were dead, that Hopper had come and rescued him not knowing whether the creatures were still there. He thought it would be best to play it as if they didn't know the gate was gone, so they didn't have to explain why it was gone. The gate closing could cause them to suspect El, but she hadn't been seen in over a year, and now

if the kids had done their job right they would have no proof it was her. Owens had mentioned to him that he might be able to explain it to them that the tunnels and creatures would have expended a large amount of energy which might have caused the portal to collapse. Hopper didn't care how he explained it, as long as it didn't look like they had anything to do with it.

He could see the lab through the trees now, an area of land cut from the forest and surrounded by fence, it was out of place here but where wouldn't it be. The agents in front had sped up which could not be good, Hopper doubted they were excited to get inside, rather that something had happened and he knew it was nothing good. He followed them through the front gate and up to the lab, where there was a large amount of military vehicles and soldered crowded outside.

The leading agent stepped out of his car and dispersed a small section of the soldiers to make his way to what they were surrounding, Hopper hoped they were just examining one of the creatures and not stood over the bodies of two children. Hopper pushed his way through the soldiers and found himself just as surprised to find Steve Harrington lying stomach down, hands behind his head surrounded by at least twenty soldiers aiming guns at him.

"Report soldier, who is this, why were they inside the lab?" asked the head agent, looking down at the suppressed Steve.

"We found him trying to sneak into the building Sir," responded a strong looking soldier who was one of the few not to appear weary of speaking in front of the boss.

"Do you know why he was trying to enter the facility," the lead agent asked to a collective silence. "Have none of you asked this boy what he is doing here?" questioned their leader to another nonexistent response.

"This is just one of towns trouble makers," Hopper responded, cutting the quiet. "He was probably trying to see some of the death rays you make here when he saw the lights were off, right kid," said Hopper to no answer from Steve, still face down on the concrete. "Maybe you should stop pointing your guns at him," instructed Hopper, the

soldiers only doing so when the agent nodded in agreement.

"Get him off the floor," asked the agent pointing at the closest soldiers. "Now boy, you are trespassing on government property, I would lock you away for life, but you are obviously too stupid to be a spy. Chief, why don't you go and teach this boy how to read signs in a cell," the agent answered cruelly.

"Sure thing," said Hopper as he grabbed the oddly silent Steve from two of the soldiers. "Come on lad, your going to have a fun night," said Hopper as he led Steve to the rear of his police car. El and Mike hadn't been discovered, what a relief, they should definitely have made an escape by now... unless there were other soldiers inside.

"What do you mean you all left the building to guard some stupid trouble maker!" Hopper heard the agent shout. So Mike and El were safe, he let out a sigh of relief. "Get back in there you little girls," demanded the agent, his miniature army complying. Hopper made a show of pushing Steve into the back of his cruiser and slammed the door just in case the agent was watching. He got in and started the car, this was going to be an interesting story as he made eye contact with Steve in his rearview mirror.

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Down below the lab Mike and El stepped into the thick spore filled air that had spread from the tunnels to the observation room. The bandanas over their faces seemed to be preventing them from breathing in anything harmful, along with the big goggles helping keep it from their eyes.

On the floor besides one of the large consoles was the map Hopper had told them about, a rudimentary drawing of Wills map. Mike picked it up and retrieved his scrunched up partial map from his pocket. Both maps had the hub area where they had burned yesterday and surrounding tunnels, by following the lab's map to the hub they could work their way back to the crop field using his map.

With the new map acquired they stepped through the broken glass window towards the elevator that would take them down into the tunnels. There was rubble mixed in with parts of the gate across the floor, along with a few dead Demo-dogs. The elevator still appeared

to be powered, so they stepped inside and El activated the elevator to lower them down into the dark tunnels.

El wasn't saying anything. The last thing she had said was for him to run, before she almost got herself caught to help him escape. He couldn't tell if she was embarrassed or angry, she didn't look like either, but what could he tell behind huge goggles and a bandana covering her face. He remained silent as the elevator continued travelling downwards into the pitch black below them.

After what seemed like forever the elevator hit the bottom of the pit with a muffled thud into the dirt. Mike could see more dead Demodogs, lying all across the ground. Some of them had clearly been shot and were still wet with blood, some had impacted the ground from so high up that their bodies had indented the ground on impact. Mike was surprisingly relieved to see that they were definitely all dead, that they had been right in their theory that with the gate closed they would all die. Mike brought his flashlight up so he could check the map on which tunnel they would be going down first.

"I'm sorry Mike," she said as they began their walk down the tunnels. She wasn't looking at him, just focusing on keeping her flashlight to the ground to avoid tripping over any of the vines or slipping on the slimy tunnel floor.

"You don't have to apologize El", he replied, "what you did was brave, far braver than anything the rest of us could have done. And look on the bright side, neither of us got caught we're both okay," reassured Mike.

"For now," she muttered, still sounding like a mixture of sad and embarrassed.

"No. Not just for now," said Mike. "The lab doesn't know you're alive, you are free. They don't care about me or the others, we are not a threat to them, they'll leave us alone provided we don't do something like Nancy and Jonathan," insisted Mike.

"What about the doctor?" she asked, still speaking slightly quieter than usual.



"Owens? I don't think you need to worry about him, Hopper trusts him and so do I," said Mike. "I know he's one of them but he seems different, he wouldn't be helping us if he wasn't, and he was definitely trying to help Will out. You don't need to worry about him, he's on our side." Mike could tell it was going to take more to convince her, and after having spent her entire life under the control or hiding from these people, he understood why.

They continued their steady pace as they made their way through the dark tunnels, filled with small and large spores falling all around them. El seemed to have stopped worrying for the moment, or at least she didn't want to keep discussing it with him right now. They just kept on walking through the tunnels, taking care at each junction to take the correct branching tunnel in the right direction and using the compass to make sure they were still headed in the direction of the pumpkin patch.

"Mike?" asked El after a few more minutes of walking through the darkness. "Will you visit everyday?"

"I promise I will try El, I might have to do things with my family or for school, but I promise if you ever need me I will be there," Mike vowed.

"Okay," he heard her say quietly after a moment as they entered a charred chamber. There was still a bit of smoke higher up in the intersection Hopper had described as a graveyard. Mike pulled out the map they had used to find this chamber from the pumpkin field and put the other map away, he reckoned he knew the way back now, but he didn't want to take an unnecessary risk.

They continued through the murky tunnels, flashlights still pointed low as they took their steps carefully. Soon they would be done with this, maybe with all of it.

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"So let me get this straight, you tried breaking into Hawkins lab so you could destroy any evidence of your girlfriend ever being there," asked Hopper to an anxious looking Steve in the back of his truck.

"She's my ex-girlfriend now actually," retorted Steve.

"It doesn't matter, you tried breaking into the one place you're supposed to be avoiding," said Hopper. "Did you even have a plan for what you were going to do, did you even know what you were looking for?"

"Yeah... I was going to sneak in and destroy tapes and log books and stuff."

"What other stuff," asked Hopper mockingly.

"You know, all the other secret recording devices and things," replied Steve.

"Okay. Do you even know where any of the tapes or log books are kept?" taunted Hopper.

"Yes... I do actually. The tapes would be in the recording room," answered Steve.

"Yeah, and what about the log books?" asked Hopper.

"Um... at the front desk, obviously, where else would they keep them."

"Okay, and what were you going to do to them. If you stole them then they would know they had been tampered with, wouldn't they?" Hopper pointed out.

Hopper could almost hear the cogs turning in Harrington's head, "I could have burnt them," Steve finally reasoned.

"Oh yes, such a great idea. Apart from the fact that there would have been no reason for there to have been a fire, would there," said Hopper.

"Listen man, you can insult my attempt at getting in there and actually doing something about this later, but we need to stop those lab guys from finding Nancy and Jonathan on those tapes and tying them to the newspaper reports," Steve declared.

"Sure thing, I mean the tapes have already been wiped and the log book records don't exist, but yeah we should get right on that,"

mocked Hopper.

"Wait, you already wiped the tapes, when did you do that," Steve asked, clearly annoyed that Hopper had been teasing him this whole time.

"I didn't do it, El and Mike snuck in and did it just before you were caught actually," explained Hopper.

"Wait. You were fine sending two kids in but you thought it was stupid for me to try it," fumed Steve.

"Well one of those kids can crush somebody's brain with their mind and the other knows how to quickly wipe data from tapes using some magnets, wire and batteries, do you really think you knew what you were doing," said Hopper.

"I could have helped, been lookout or extra protection or something."

"Yeah, you would have been a great help, you weren't just captured by the very people you were meant to be deceiving," Hopper pointed out.

"At least I did something, you sent two kids into a dangerous place while you did nothing."

"You think I did nothing! I gave them their only way in and warned them when they needed to get out. I would have been in their instead of them if I could but the only way to pull this off was to have them on the inside," retorted Hopper.

"Then where are they now then, don't you need to get them out or something?" asked Steve.

"No, they got themselves out, and we are on our way to pick them up, Hopper explained.

"Then we are headed the wrong way, we have been driving away from the lab," Steve told Hopper as if he didn't know that.

"That's because we're picking them up from that hole into the tunnels from the pumpkin field, where you took the kids in to burn that

chamber," said Hopper.

Steven clearly picked up on the annoyance in his voice, "Hey, that wasn't my fault, they took me there and I couldn't talk them out of it. I figured it was better I help than leave them to be eaten, so your welcome," said Steve, clearly not actually picking up how annoyed Hopper had been that they had done that. It had got them to the gate and it had turned out alright, but Hawkins could have easily lost the five of them because Steve failed to stop them.

Hopper decided to stop talking to Steve, they were almost at the pit and he couldn't stand speaking to him longer than he already had. Hopper didn't know for sure that El and Mike had actually made it out or that they had completed what they had been sent to do, but he felt like they had. A feeling he wouldn't usually rely on but he had nothing else to go on and in a few minutes he'd know for sure, as he drove into the pumpkin patch.

He skid his truck to a stop in front of the pit, switching off the engine but leaving his lights on to provide them with some light. Partially to his annoyance Steve also exited his truck, "Grab the rope from the trunk and tie it to the front," ordered Hopper, at least giving Steve some reason for being there.

Hopper made his way down to the edge of the hole and looked down into the darkness below him, he couldn't see them, he was going to have to go looking. He quickly scrambled back up to his truck and retrieved the flash light, passing Steve who was tying the rope on as he made his way back down to the edge of the pit. But before he lowered himself down into the pitchblack tunnel below, he saw flashlight light flickering beneath him.

"Hey, exits up here!" he shouted down into the tunnel below, he was beyond relieved to know they were out. "Hey, pass that rope," said Hopper, who then dropped it down into the tunnel. "Are you guys okay!" Hopper bellowed down through the tunnel.

"Yeah, no need to be so loud, we are right below you," replied Mike, something Hopper hadn't noticed before probably deafening them.

"El, are you okay?" asked Hopper, unable to properly see her and

unwilling to blind them with his flashlight after deafening them.

"Yes," said El loudly, mocking Hopper. He could hear the two kids laughing down in the pit.

"I am fine with burying you both down there," joked Hopper. He put one foot on the rope and lowered an arm down. He could feel the rope moving below his foot as El clambered up, he grabbed her arm and pulling her up the rest of the way, straight into an embrace. "Thank God you're alright kid," exclaimed Hopper, squeezing the mask into his shoulder and probably into her face.

"Get Mike out," he heard El say muffled by his shoulder as she wriggled free from his grasp. She put her arm down into the pit to grab Mike's as he climbed out of the hole.

"Welcome back, did everything go according to plan?" asked Hopper as Mike and El stood up and wiped the dirt of their fronts.

"Mostly, we got the tape from last night with El on it and wiped the one of Nancy and Jonathan along with a few others and made it look like the room had been attacked. We also got the bug list," added Mike.

"We almost got caught," said El as she began making her way back up to the truck. "But they left before they found us."

"Yeah, they all just left the building before coming up, was that you?" asked Mike. Before Hopper could say anything, Steve interjected while untying the rope.

"What do you know, I was useful. That was me, by the way, I distracted them so you could escape," Steve explained basically lying.

"What the hell is he doing here," asked Mike.

"Steve got himself caught trying to do what you did, he didn't even know you were in there," elaborated Hopper.

"I don't see how that matters, I accidently helped, the most important kind," Steve rationalised to himself just as much as any of the others.

"It doesn't matter, we just need to go debrief at Joyces and then we are all done with this... well most of us anyway," said Hopper.

"Debrief? What does that mean," asked Steve as he pulled the rope back towards himself. He had been expecting that question from El, not the highschooler.

"It basically means he's going to tell us what happens next, mainly to forget what happened, don't talk about it with anyone and stay away from the Department of Energy," answered Mike.

"Yeah... along those lines," replied Hopper as he entered the drivers seat of his vehicle.

"Then can you just drop me off at my car so I can go home," Steve asked, seemingly not fond of the idea of spending any more time dealing with this.

"No. You can go get your car tomorrow, now get in so we can go," ordered Hopper as he started the engine. El and Mike had taken the back seats which meant Harrington got in the passenger seat next to him, hopefully the kids in the back could draw out the story of how it all happened long enough to prevent Steve from annoying Hopper any more than he already had.